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LOOSE LADIES

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LOOSE LADIES

BY VIÑA DELMAR

author of

BAD GIRL

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I. LUCETTE

Hard as Nails

Of course Fordham is a part of New York. It might have arranged things differently in its youth had it known then how self-sufficient it was going to become. But it couldn't have possibly foreseen in its youth that the day was coming that Fordham would have everything that one could get anywhere else.

Now I am not making a claim that you can step out any day in the week along Fordham's prominent avenue and pick yourself a genuine solid mahogany chest of drawers formerly used by John Alden or Betsy Ross. That's not my claim. Nor can you reach up into Fordham's extra-pure air and drag down a you[illegible]-carat blue-white diamond. But if it's an ordinary chest of drawers you're after or a reasonably sized diamond—why go downtown? However, if you must go downtown we are sorry but not embarrassed, for we have two or three subway stations to offer you and a 'bus line. Also we are overrun with taxicabs if that happens to be your meat. But must you really go downtown?

Fordham Road is lined with stores from stem to stern. Some are strictly one-price stores. Lucette's was strictly one-price, and I could mention many others of like distinction, but we are here solely to talk about Lucette.

We will call her Lucette because that is the name she had in gold letters on the plate-glass window of her store. What her name really was doesn't matter. What Lucette was matters greatly. A customer dropping in to buy something dark and serviceable for business or perhaps one of those billowing chiffon things for dancing always saw Lucette. She was on the job twelve hours a day. The customer saw that Lucette was the owner of this nice dress shop with its corner location and that she was extraordinarily attractive.

The customer of course couldn't see that Lucette was an amazingly keen business woman. One has an idea that a shop-lady's [illegible] her earnest desire to please spring [illegible] admiration for oneself. Lucette had tw[illegible] shop as assistants, but she could tell [illegible] which customers had more than nine [illegible]ght to spend, and she waited on those herself. These things a customer could not tell about Lucette nor could they tell that she was hard as nails.

Lucette had started her business career as an errand girl down at Bonteaux Sœurs. A very in-

triguing errand girl she had been with her dusky, golden skin and deep blue eyes. She had had the poise and arrogant slimness of a mannequin. Her head had been carried with the correct amount of pride, and her dark, waving hair had supplied just the proper dash to ease your feelings if perhaps you had felt squelched by the regal tilt of a small, firm chin.

The Bonteaux Sœurs noticed their errand girl one day when they were short of mannequins. She was swiftly summoned to the warm, perfumed, satin-lined sanctum sanctorum.

"Do you think you could model gowns?" asked the small, black-eyed younger sister.

"Sure," said she who was not yet called Lucette. She chewed her gum with feverish intensity due to her excitement.

The Bonteaux Sœurs looked at each other, then at their errand girl [illegible]rled in mutual agreement.

"Would you [illegible]o be a model?" asked the older plump sis[illegible]

"What's in [illegible]ne?" The chewing-gum made thoughtful, argumentative sounds. "I'd just as soon be an errand girl if there ain't much extra money in the change."

"Have you no interest in bettering yourself in life?" asked one of the women.

The errand girl sneered amiably. "Call being a mannequin bettering myself? Heck, I got plans for myself that'd knock a mannequin's eye out."

The Bonteaux Sœurs conversed between themselves for a moment in their native tongue. Then the elder turned in the direction of the chewing-gum.

"Our customers sometimes bring gentlemen with them," she said. "A husband, a sweetheart, a father, sometimes a son. Suppose you were a mannequin and one of these gentlemen should suggest meeting you outside our establishment for dinner or the theater. What would you say?"

"I'd tell him plenty," was the quick answer. "If I want rough stuff I can get it in pleasanter places than this."

"You may run along," said the Bonteaux Sœurs in unison.

And somehow, though she had the loveliest face the Bonteaux Sœurs had ever seen and a form that would have made a potato sack look like a coronation robe, the girl I have reference to never became a mannequin.

In fact a week after this interview with her employers, the errand girl was discharged for no reason obvious to her. She shrugged her shoulders and departed from the shop. There were other jobs.

In fact there were many other jobs run to earth in the next four years. She kept her eyes open and watched. She learned to keep her voice down and her courage up. She learned to be hard and live dangerously without ever having heard of Nietzsche. She learned that there was no substitute for happiness but that you could kid yourself into thinking there was. She learned that it was good for business to be courteous and grave, and good for the soul to be impetuous and gay. She learned that beauty would get you anywhere in the world but that it alone would not hold you there. She learned that inferior men were attracted to her, that men with delicate sensibilities and serious eyes saw her once and then fled. That made her laugh. It was easy to laugh when you remembered that nothing in the world could hurt you once you were hard enough.

There was a game of dice played one day in the back room of a speakeasy. An inferior sort of man with a little black mustache came forth blinking dazzled eyes up at the morning sun. He had won eighty-five hundred dollars. With that money he could pull out of town and begin a new life—

A girl who always attracted inferior men stopped selling notions that day and began to realize a dream. Her own shop at last! Eighty-five hundred would at least start her off. She thought that Lucette would

be a good name to put on the window, with of course the words 'Formerly of Bonteaux Sœurs' written beneath.

And so there was her shop on Fordham Road. The Lucette Shop. Frocks and wraps for all occasions. Sometimes, when her shop closed at nine o'clock, there would be a man with a little black mustache waiting to take Lucette home to her apartment in the Ethan Allen Arms. He would stand patiently awaiting her, for he knew that there was no disappointment in store for him. Other appointments or even business went by the board on the nights when he waited there for her. She would look between the gold letters which spelled her name on the window and she would square her slim shoulders and go out to meet him.

There was nothing that interested Lucette more than business. She watched with keen blue eyes the successes and failures in Fordham. She watched stores open and laid little bets with herself about them. That hosiery shop now was bound to make money. They had a good line of stuff and a fine location, but what had ever possessed that furniture man to open a store on the same block with a well-known firm's Fordham branch?

And that book shop with its circulating library? Could there really be a living in a book shop anywhere? Certainly not in this book shop. Lucette's

interest was keenly awakened. The Uptown Library the place was called. It was directly across the street from the Lucette shop. It was not difficult for Lucette to count the pitifully few Fordhamites who were glad to find a book shop in their midst.

One day Lucette crossed the street and joined the library. The proprietor's name was Ralph Joyce. He and Lucette exchanged no more words than were necessary to make her a member of the Uptown Library.

"You pay a dollar to join," he explained. "This is given back to you when you drop your membership. You pay a quarter a week for the books you borrow."

"I see," said Lucette. She paid a dollar.

She borrowed a book. That night was Saturday. Lucette was in her shop till eleven-thirty selling dresses. With one eye she watched her customers' reactions on being shown the stock. With the other eye Lucette watched a shop across the street where there was a young, grave-eyed man who had not known in time that Fordham is not famous for its reading public.

Monday morning Lucette brought her book back to Ralph Joyce. He stamped it and with a weary motion placed it back on the shelf. Lucette was appalled at the number of books he had in the shop. She had never guessed that there were so many books.

"You certainly have enough books," she commented.

The proprietor of the Uptown Library smiled grimly. "Too many," he said. "What do the people do with their time around here if they don't read?"

"They dance and love and get married and have babies in that order of going," said Lucette.

"So does most of the world," said the man, "but not to complete exclusion."

"Well, it's a tough break for you, fellow," said Lucette. "Why didn't you open a little leather goods store or a haberdashery?"

Ralph Joyce fastened two scornful green-gray eyes upon Lucette. Then he looked away from her and reached for a book. "This just came," he said in a businesslike manner. "It's very new. A romance with the scene laid in the old West."

"Do I look like a romance hound?" asked Lucette.

Ralph Joyce favored her with a look. "Yes," he said at last. "You look as though you'd like a romance."

"You have me wrong," said Lucette. "I'm the least romantic woman in the world. To me, love means the same thing that it means in tennis. Give me a murder mystery with plenty of blood."

In the days that followed Lucette read a great many books. Every morning she brought back to

the library the book which she had taken the previous day. Sometimes she hadn't read the book, but she felt that she ought to bring it back to Mr. Joyce. Perhaps somebody would come into his shop who wanted that book or perhaps she would lose it if she didn't return it at once. Besides, she told herself, it was her sacred duty as a business woman of Fordham to do all she could for other business people, and maybe it cheered Mr. Joyce up to see her reading so many books.

With this last thought in mind she doubled her order and took two books with her the next time she went to his shop.

He seemed a little amused at her selection. She saw him eyeing her a little doubtfully.

"What's handing you the laugh?" she said.

"I wasn't laughing," he replied.

"Then you'd better go see a doctor. Your face needs fixing."

"I was just thinking," he said, "that perhaps there are authors that would suit your taste better than Cabell and Komroff."

"Oh, I see. Too high brow for me? It's all right, brother, I don't read the books. I use them for doorstops."

"I didn't mean to be insulting. It's just that many women find Cabell a bit involved and difficult. Kom-

roff is even more profound. My wife doesn't get the maximum amount of pleasure from reading either of them."

Lucette's eyes wandered from the book shelf up to Ralph Joyce's face. He had a wife. How interesting. A wife, eh? Well, wasn't that nice? And his wife probably liked to run her hands through his black, straight hair and say things that would make him smile his rare smile. So he had a wife? Well, imagine that now. Lucette wondered what his wife was like.

The next evening Lucette was standing at the door of her shop looking out at busy Fordham Road. She was wondering how out of all the occupations and locations there are in the world a chap should suddenly arise and declare, "Well, I'm going to open a book shop on Fordham Road." She felt very sorry for Ralph Joyce. It costs money to open even a book shop, and his time counted for something, too. Then there was his disappointment to think of. Lucette assured herself that she was indeed a business woman to the core when the failure of a shop in the neighborhood could make her feel so broken up.

She must have been looking at the Uptown Library, for she saw its lights go out and presently she saw Ralph Joyce emerge with a lady. He locked

the door, and he and the lady walked away. They paused at the window of a millinery store for a brief moment, then continued on down the street.

A girl with honey-colored hair came into Lucette's shop. She wanted something for business. Lucette showed her everything suitable for business and then began on the sports wear. No, it appeared that was not what the girl had meant at all. Desperately Lucette yanked at a column of dresses meant for semiformal wear. Ah, the customer's eyes brightened. Just the thing for running to the office at eight A.M., that little sleeveless thing with the rhinestone girdle. But, stay yet a moment, wasn't that strawberry-colored georgette with the embroidery a shade more attractive? Lucette stood by silently. She smiled to keep from shrieking. It was now only a matter of choosing the frock which was the more glaringly unsuitable for business. Lucette knew that at all hazards her cash register was going to receive twenty-nine dollars and fifty cents. It was while the choosing was going on that Ralph Joyce and his lady entered the Lucette Shop.

"Miss Hazel," called Lucette.

Miss Hazel came bouncing from the rear of the store where she had been reading a magazine. Lucette gestured toward the girl with the honey-colored hair.

"Mademoiselle needs an expert opinion," said

Lucette, "in deciding between these two sweet frocks. Perhaps she will take both."

Mademoiselle said, "Fat chance. One'll cripple my pocket-book."

Lucette smiled and approached the Joyces. Ralph was surprised to see her. He had not known that this was her shop nor even that she had a shop. In the alien atmosphere of female frocks and wraps he was a considerably subdued animal. There was no trace of amusement on his face, and his greeting to Lucette was tinged slightly with respect.

Mrs. Joyce spoke before Lucette could reply to Ralph's greeting. "What is the price of the tan ensemble in the window?" she asked.

"It is thirty-nine ninety-eight," said Lucette. "Kashkara, you know. It's going to be the big thing this season. Wouldn't you like to try it on? It would fit you perfectly, I know."

Lucette had sized Mrs. Joyce up while she was speaking. Pampered baby type. Curly, auburn hair. Tiny, tip-tilted nose and small, childishly pink mouth. The kind of mouth that can pout so prettily one minute and curl so contemptuously the next. Small in stature, almost doll-like. She wore a poke bonnet that gave a very little-girlish look to her face, but Lucette had seen Helen Joyce's eyes. They were great, brown eyes, a little too alert, a little too wise-looking to be consistent with the wide, wondering

stare they carried. Then, too, there had been Mrs. Joyce's curt, businesslike way of inquiring about the Kashkara ensemble. The girls who were really as helpless as Mrs. Joyce looked to be had to be shown eighty sport coats and forty evening wraps before it could be pried out of them that they had come to inquire about the black velvet dress in the window.

Mrs. Joyce said, "I'd like to see the ensemble at close range." Terse, to-the-point phrases coming crisply from small, pink lips. No wonder she had landed Ralph Joyce if he was the man she had wanted. An unbeatable, guileless-looking combine. Like a Ford body with a Stutz motor under the hood.

Lucette's eyes wandered from the book shelf up the Kashkara ensemble. Mrs. Joyce looked it over well. She examined the seams. She dreamed over the lining. She turned the sleeve halfway inside out. At last she condescended to try it on.

Ralph Joyce sat down on a chair which Miss Hazel brought him while his wife repaired with Lucette to the fitting-room. Somehow Lucette wished that she had let Miss Hazel wait on the Joyces. The girl with the honey-colored hair departed with her strawberry georgette frock, and Miss Hazel was free to talk to Ralph Joyce if she liked.

And they were talking. Lucette could hear them.

"May I smoke in here?" Ralph was asking.

"Certainly," said Miss Hazel; "sometimes the

ladies do. Miss Lucette would sooner let a man smoke, though. The ladies are so careless. One dropped a cigarette on a maline dress one day. It burned a big hole."

"Did she pay for it?" asked Ralph.

"Oh, I guess she could have been made to," said Miss Hazel, "but Lucette didn't ask her to. She was a good customer and it wasn't a terribly expensive dress."

"I guess Miss Lucette's insurance covered the loss anyhow," Lucette heard Ralph say.

"Maybe it did."

"It would, of course. Fire insurance is a great thing. I suppose every store in the world carries some."

"Do they?" asked Miss Hazel.

"Crazy if they don't." Lucette was amazed at his friendliness. Quite chatty with Miss Hazel. Talking over her business, and yet there was darn little he ever had to say to Miss Hazel's employer.

Lucette turned her attention to Mrs. Joyce's lingerie. Very smart. Expensive stuff. She never bought that on what the book shop brought in. Probably her trousseau was still serving. They were married about a year, Lucette figured.

Yes, a year, Lucette decided when Mrs. Joyce stepped out of the fitting-room wearing the ensemble. After a year husbands didn't greet their wives' en-

trances with such a kindling of lovelight in their eyes and such unquestioning, unreasoning admiration.

"Of course," said Mrs. Joyce, "the skirt will need shortening."

Lucette went to get some pins. It was poor business not to show the customer at once how the skirt would look when shortened.

She saw Mrs. Joyce whispering to Ralph. She saw him look startled and shake his head. Mrs. Joyce's lips then registered scorn. Her whisper came hissing its way to Lucette's ears.

"It wouldn't hurt to ask her. People often give discounts to other business people in the same neighborhood. You ask her, Ralph."

Lucette came hustling back with the pins. Ralph Joyce was admiring his wife in the jaunty ensemble, but there was an expression in his eyes that said, "Thirty-nine ninety-eight, and tomorrow's the first of the month."

Lucette gave him a lead. "Downtown they sell this for sixty dollars," she said.

Mrs. Joyce cast a swift look at her husband. He met her eyes pleadingly, then looked away.

"It will be ready for you at eleven o'clock tomorrow morning," said Lucette, deftly inserting the last pin. "With the discount I give the wives of merchants on this block, the ensemble will come to twenty-five dollars. Fair enough, Mr. Joyce?"

He didn't say anything. He just nodded, but Lucette didn't think him unappreciative, because she had seen the look in his eyes. She also saw the self-satisfied, I-told-you-so glance which Mrs. Joyce wore.

When they had gone from the shop, Lucette took down a fifteen-dollar dress and put a new tag on it. The tag read twenty-two fifty. Miss Hazel never saw Lucette do such a thing before.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"It's bum business not to at least break even," Lucette replied, but Miss Hazel didn't understand even then.

After that night Ralph Joyce and Lucette became better friends. She knew that this was not because he had paid any extra attention to Lucette but because he was impressed by the prosperity of her shop and respectful of her ability to have built up the business. She did not care what it was that had suddenly caused him to talk to her in an easy, interested manner. It was just nice to fall into the habit of calling him Ralph and to surprise him once in a while with an intelligent criticism on a book.

She was reading the books now. It wasn't business, she told herself, not to get her money's worth. She was paying for the books; why not read them? Besides, Ralph must think her an awful dumbbell.

Their conversations were curious. Ralph Joyce had

been schooled to believe that there were ladies and wantons in the world. If a female wasn't a wanton, she was a lady. Lucette was obviously not a wanton. She must be a lady, then. Still, her casual way of handling life's problems amazed him. Ofttimes it revolted him.

"Got no kid, have you?" she asked one day.

He shook his head.

"Going to have one?" she persisted.

"That rests with the Fates," said Ralph.

"Horseradish," replied Lucette. "Nowadays a person states their intentions."

"Possibly in private," he rebuked her.

But most times they understood each other. Once on a winter's afternoon, Lucette and Ralph were alone in the book shop. The first heavy snow of the year was falling outside, and Fordham Road was deserted and grim. It was cheerful in the book shop. Lucette was having her lunch there with Ralph. The delicatessen store sent him two sandwiches each noon, but for this day Lucette had canceled his order and had brought in dainty sandwiches and pastry from the French Shop.

"It's my birthday," she said to him, smiling up at him over her bundles, "and I didn't want lunch in a restaurant or back of my store with Hazel and Alice."

He had agreed to lunch with her, but not without misgivings. He had never seen, but he could imagine,

Helen in a high state of jealousy. Somehow in the course of their conversation he grew less worried. Lucette was an amusing type, he thought.

"Another birthday," she said. "I'd better stop having them soon."

"May I ask—"

"Twenty-eight," said Lucette.

"I'm thirty-two," he told her, "and I'm still floundering around aimlessly."

His head was a trifle bent. Now was the moment when a person sitting as near to him as she was sitting could smooth down his rumpled hair. It would be a gesture of tenderness and understanding, Lucette thought. It was a perfect moment for such a gesture if there was a woman sitting there who wasn't hard and who cared about the failure of a grave-eyed man in his little book shop. Lucette caught her breath hard.

"I'll probably be saying the same thing when I'm forty-two," he said after a moment.

His hand was very close to hers. He was fumbling idly with a pencil. A soft woman could lay her hand gently upon his and assure him that life for a man was just begun at thirty-two. A soft woman could do that. Lucette walked away from him and stood with her dusky slimness against the wall. She didn't want to stay close to him. Suppose somebody should come in? It wasn't good business to cause gossip.

"I guess you think I'm pretty sorry for myself," he said. "It isn't entirely self-pity. I'm sorry for Helen. She deserves more than a three-room apartment on Morris Avenue. She's used to pretty things. I'm not the man she should have married."

"No, she should have had the Prince of Wales," said Lucette, sharply. "Nobody else."

"She and I were too hasty, I guess," he went on. "Not that I regret it except where she's concerned. I hate to see her doing without a maid. Housework is hard for her."

"I work twelve hours in the shop," said Lucette, "and then go home and do my housework. Women aren't as weak as nice men think they are, Ralph."

"But Helen had so much," said Ralph. "Her people own a huge business in California."

"Why didn't she stay there?"

"I'm a New Yorker. I had a silly idea that here was my best chance in life, so I exposed Helen to three rooms on Morris Avenue and the life of any uptown middle-class woman."

"Most of them find it a pleasant enough life," Lucette said. "They have children and help their husbands save money, and if their husbands own stores they frequently take charge of them three or four hours a day."

"I wish for Helen's sake I'd stayed in California," Ralph said. "Her father offered me a nice position

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there. I was too full of my own ideas to take it. I still would rather be here in my own starving shop than work for my father-in-law, but it's not right for Helen to be having nothing out of life."

Lucette moved away from the wall. She went to the book shelves and looked at them hard. Suppose they were gone? Suppose there was a "For Rent" sign in the window of what had been the Uptown Library? She shook herself. A blot on Fordham Road, she said to herself, an empty store where somebody had failed.

"Why," she asked, "don't you go back to California and take the job?"

He looked around the shop. His gaze was drearily explanatory. "Every cent I have is here," he said. "Can I sell this shop? Who would buy it? Can I go back to Helen's people without a nickel? Can I take Helen back without a decent amount of good clothes and say, 'For Heaven's sake give me that job quick'? No, my dear child, there is still pride left."

Lucette turned then and looked at him. Her blue eyes were ablaze with light. Her words caught in her throat.

"Keep your pride," she said. "Don't pocket it for anybody. Fight and you'll come out on top. Just hold on. People will come. You'll see!"

"Yes, but in the meanwhile Helen will have grown tired of waiting. She will go back to her father."

"Oh." Lucette was staggered at the pettiness of the woman Ralph loved. "Has she said that she would do that?"

He did not meet Lucette's eyes. "You can't blame her," he said. "She is having a harder time than I. She loved pretty clothes and good times. I haven't been able to give them to her. I've missed up somehow on my duty."

"Oh, Ralph, would she really leave you?"

"She's only within her rights if she does," he said. "A husband is supposed to provide a reasonable amount of comfort for his wife. Helen knows her rights. She will be in California before long if your delightful Fordham doesn't get a little excited over having all the latest fiction at its command for such a small rate."

"But you could go with her."

"Yes, I have my choice between seeing Helen leave me or crawling back utterly whipped with my wife dressed in almost the same things she left California with. To tell the truth, I don't know which alternative offers the least pain—losing Helen or going back to the in-laws penniless."

"If you had Helen all smartly dressed and a few hundred besides you could go back with dignity, couldn't you, Ralph?"

"Of course, then I could—" he began, but stopped suddenly and looked at Lucette with cold, hard eyes.

"It is easier to go back broke, though," he said, "than to borrow money from a woman."

"I'm not a woman, I'm the proprietor of the Lucette Shop, Ralph. Some day you could pay me back at, let us say, six per cent. interest. You could mail me a check from your office three thousand miles from Fordham. I'd make money on the deal."

"Sorry." He snapped the word at her, and a strange wave of exultation leaped within Lucette's breast.

A customer came into the shop and Lucette departed hurriedly. In her own place Miss Hazel and Miss Alice were playing checkers in the fitting-room. Nobody was shopping for frocks on a day like this. Lucette prowled up and down the shop. Miss Hazel saw her bite her nails. Lucette never bit her elegant long nails. Something was wrong. The girls hardly dared speak to her.

It had stopped snowing the next day. There was sunlight glittering on the high white banks in the street. Fordham Road was agog with cheerful sounds and hurrying women. Mrs. Joyce was the first visitor to the Lucette Shop.

"Good morning," she said to Lucette. "How much is the little pale green dress down near the corner?"

"Nineteen fifty," said Lucette; "fourteen dollars to you."

"Let me try it on."

Lucette took the dress from the window. Mrs. Joyce tried it on. It was lovely on her. Lucette knew how Ralph's eyes would gleam at this charming vision in pale green.

"I'll take it," said Mrs. Joyce, "but Mr. Joyce is a little short of cash today. Would you mind charging it?"

"Not at all," said Lucette.

Mrs. Joyce left the shop with her package. It was a pretty package. Lucette didn't believe in ordinary gray cardboard boxes. Hers were black and orange stripes with "Lucette" inscribed upon them in gold. She watched Mrs. Joyce cross the street and enter the library. She sighed and turned from the window.

Presently Mrs. Joyce came in again. She looked slightly agitated. She threw the pretty box with ungracious carelessness upon a chair.

"It seems," she said, "that Mr. Joyce never heard of charging a dress before. Don't they do that in New York?"

She was gone before Lucette could answer her. Once again she crossed the street, and Lucette could see her standing against the book shelves talking, talking, talking.

Lucette slipped into her coat and picked up the box which held the pale green frock. She crossed the street.

Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Joyce did not see her enter

the book shop. Ralph was sitting at the desk with his head in his hands. Mrs. Joyce had all her attention leveled at his bent head. Lucette closed the door quietly.

"And my father would die if he thought I couldn't have an insignificant fourteen-dollar dress. So upright you are you wouldn't charge it because you can't afford to pay for it at once. You don't care though that I haven't a stitch to wear—"

Lucette turned and banged the door. The Joyces looked up at her.

"Does it displease you," she asked of Ralph, "that Mrs. Joyce has opened an account in my shop? I assure you that the best people have them. There is no disgrace attached to a charge account."

"There is," Ralph thundered, "when you can't meet the bills."

"You could meet bills if you weren't so obstinate. If you cared a hoot about me, you wouldn't be letting me wear clothes out of a cheap uptown dress shop. That's neither here nor there now." She turned to Lucette. "You needn't bother your head about a charge account for me." She brushed by Lucette and was out of the shop in a flash.

Ralph stared after her. "Now," he said, and there was the slightest ghost of a bitter smile upon his lips, "is the moment when I must decide whether to lose her or go back beaten and broke to her parents."

"Be hard, Ralph. It saves wear and tear on the heart."

"Be hard when you love somebody as I love that girl?"

Lucette nodded. "It's an armor," she said, "and an opiate. Try it."

"I'm afraid I can't. I think today will see the passing of the Uptown Library. I ought to be able to get the fare to California out of it anyhow, and the old man will give us enough to start living when we get there."

"Oh, Ralph."

"Do me a favor, Lucette. Lend me one of your girls to watch the shop for just a few minutes while I run over to the house and tell Helen that I'll go with her. She's probably packing. She didn't wire home for money yet. I saw her make a dash straight for the apartment."

Lucette went back to the shop and sent Hazel over. She stood at her window and watched Ralph come out. He walked quickly, but there was a story in the droop of his shoulders. Lucette failed to make a sale to a customer who was actually eager to buy an evening dress. She bit another finger nail. She thought of Hazel sitting across the street in the little shop. It was good that she had sent Hazel and had not stayed there herself. Had she stayed she might have— Well, she might have spilled the ink.

Ralph came in. He stood in the doorway talking to Lucette.

"She's going back," he said. "I couldn't say I'd go, Lucette. At the last minute I couldn't see myself crawling back absolutely licked to her father. God, what will I do without her?"

Lucette could not speak. It was a terrible moment. Ralph stumbled from her shop—a man whom Fate had coming and going.

Evening came and bent languorously over Fordham Road. Lights were lit in the shops. Couples came out to stroll. Lucette stood at the window of her shop looking across the street. Watching. Nine o'clock. The big light in the window of the Uptown Library went out. Lucette saw Ralph reach for his hat and coat. She went into the back of her store and got something. With it in her hand she ran across Fordham Road. She caught Ralph just as he was locking the door.

"Oh, Ralph, let me get that mystery everybody's talking about. I know just where it is."

She rushed past him to the book shelves and grabbed a book before he was fully aware of her presence. What she held in her hand she dropped into his waste basket. She was back at his side. He had not moved from the threshold.

"Good night," she said, abruptly.

She ran back to her shop and he turned toward

Morris Avenue. She attended to her own closing for the night then. Mechanically she went about it. Through the window she could see a little inferior sort of man with a black mustache waiting for her.

She slowly, thoughtfully powdered her nose and put on her hat. From the fitting-room she could hear a sudden bustle and noise in the street. Fire engines. A deafening clang.

"My God," cried Miss Hazel. "Look at that. It's right across the street."

"Don't bother me," said Lucette. "I have a date."

She went out to meet the little man. He was gazing enraptured at the flames.

"Look at that," he said. "The fire's got a nice play. It's a windy night. I hope all those store keepers have fire insurance. It'll probably take the whole row."

"Oh, I guess most of them have insurance," said Lucette. "It isn't a devil of a lot, but it'll save a person from looking like a pauper. The hell with them and their fire, anyhow. Let's get good and drunk tonight. What do I care for other people's fires?"

"Gee, you're hard as nails," said the inferior little man.

There's only a few more lines to recount. Mrs. Hoffman of Loring Place said one day to Mrs. Gerber, also of Loring Place, "Say, do you think that there Lucette who runs that dress shop is as refined as she seems?"

"Yeh. Why?" Mrs. Gerber's tone showed that she was open to conviction.

"Well, I saw her outside her store—I don't just remember which night—and she was standing right on the pavement, mind you, with a cigarette in her hand. She crossed the street with it bold as anything. Is that nice, I ask you, Mrs. Gerber?"

II. SYLVIA

Blind Date

Sylvia lay on the couch watching her mother carry the dinner dishes to the sink in the kitchenette. Sylvia could have helped and perhaps she should have, but looking at things from an unbiased angle, Sylvia didn't see why she should. To begin with, Sylvia had worked eight hours in an office downtown that day and had then ridden forty minutes in a subway train while hanging on to a strap. Mother had done nothing but straighten two rooms in a very casual manner and then bounce off to the movies. Slinging all the bromides about elderly people into the discard, Sylvia decided that Mother couldn't possibly be as tired as she herself. She closed her eyes and drowsed. Mother's voice awakened her.

Sylvia looked up and realized that she must have slept an hour. The dishes were done and Mother was standing near her, wearing her hat and coat.

"Sylvia, could you let me have a dollar? I'm going over to Davidson Avenue to see the Kahns, and they may start a penny ante game."

Sylvia yawned and reached for her pocketbook. She drew out a dollar and handed it to her mother.

"Thanks. Get to bed now, Sylvia. You look tired. Good night."

"Good night."

Sylvia remained on the couch. She wasn't sleepy any more. Mother's request had started her thinking of her problems. Forty-two dollars a month for a kitchenette apartment on the top floor of a Fordham walkup. Miles of apartment-hunting had satisfied her that this was the best she could do. Thirty dollars a week was her salary, and because Sylvia always faced facts with herself she knew that she would never be worth more than that to any business office. Food, clothes, rent, gas, electricity, insurance, doctor's bills, recreation—all these things must come from that little thirty dollars a week.

Sylvia pressed her hands to her eyelids and sighed deeply. There was a pain which came in the back of her head when thoughts like this assailed her. Mother was such a care. Stupid as a child about money. She could not be given a weekly amount but had to have a dollar and a quarter a day doled out to her for table expenses lest she spend the full amount in her first morning's shopping. Mother's heart trouble was another worry. She could be talked out of an attack, which showed plainly that her condition was not serious. Still, at frequent intervals she would insist

that she needed a doctor, and Sylvia, afraid to lean too strongly upon the notion that Mother was exaggerating her discomfort, would call a doctor. Mother was not mean, only stupid and thoughtless. Sylvia sighed again. What did the future hold? Suppose she fell in love? She could not marry. Where was there a man in her world who could afford to support his wife's mother? She saw herself twenty years hence still doling out a dollar and a quarter every morning. But wait, the firm would not keep her when she wasn't slim and young. She would be discharged, and then what? Sylvia turned and buried her face in the pillow.

The phone rang. It was Miriam, Sylvia's girl friend.

"'Lo, Syl, what are you doing?"

"Nothing. Why?"

"Like to go out?"

"Where?"

"I don't know. Paul Reiselbach called me up and asked me to go out. Said he had a fellow with him and asked me to get another girl."

"Who's Paul Reiselbach?"

"Oh, you know, Syl. He's that mug who has the big car I was admiring when he came along and saw me. I was feeling the upholstery when he came up and he started to talk to me. I ain't one for talking to everybody. You know that, Syl, so I just gave him

my phone number when he asked for it and then I walked away. So he called me up tonight. I guess he's got a swell friend. Do you want to come with us?"

"I don't know, Miriam. I've never been on a blind date. I've got a hunch the fellow will look like the breaking up of a hard winter or else he'll be as fresh as the devil."

"Oh, come on, Syl. Be a sport. If he's homely, you can bear it for one evening, and if he's fresh, sock him and forget it. Come on."

Sylvia thought it over for a moment. After all, an evening alone offered nothing but a melancholy soliloquy on the impossibility of making ends meet.

"All right, Miriam. I'll go. Where'll I meet you?"

"Come over here. Paul says they'll be around about nine."

"All right. I'll be over."

Sylvia replaced the receiver and walked to the bedroom. What would she wear? There was either that brown taffeta dress or the blue velvet. They were both old and they both looked it. The blue velvet was a little too rubbed-looking at the elbows, so it would have to be the brown taffeta.

Sylvia threw off her sweater and skirt and began to brush her hair vigorously. The more she brushed it the fluffier it got. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled to see what a frivolous creature her hair

made her out to be. Who would believe that a brain simply sick with worry could lie beneath a mass of waves and ringlets?

Later when she had the brown taffeta on and had added color to her lips and cheeks she looked again at her reflection. She thought of something she had heard in the office that day. The boss had been entertaining a social caller when Sylvia had walked in to announce that Mr. Glassmeir was outside.

"Cope with him for ten minutes," the boss had ordered; "then I'll see him."

Sylvia had withdrawn to start coping. The boss's caller had not waited for her to get beyond earshot before remarking, "Say, Sam, that's a beauty you got working for you."

The boss had laughed. "I can't have a chromo to keep the trade in a good humor, can I?"

"Why don't you have her modeling the gowns, Sam?"

"She's got a little brains. Why waste her on modeling?"

Sylvia pulled a chair over to the closet and began to rummage on the hat shelf. Now there *was* a brown felt— "Oh, there it was. She took it down and looked at it. She brushed it and looked at it again. Not exactly passable. Still—when it was on it looked much better. It seemed to take on an importance. God bless Mr. Finkelthal for believing that she had

helped him with the boss. The coat he had given her two years ago was still standing up well. Sylvia had heard that it was made to retail at a hundred and fifty dollars.

She was ready now. She cast a last look about the apartment to be sure that everything was all right. Halfway down the hall she stopped and returned to the living-room. She found a pencil and hastily scribbled a note to her mother: "Have gone out. Don't worry. May stay at Miriam's tonight."

Sylvia propped the note against a book in the center of the table and left a dollar and a quarter in a conspicuous position. She didn't think it likely that she would stay at Miriam's, but the possibility would keep Mother from waiting up for her.

Miriam lived on Creston Avenue in a large apartment. Both her parents were alive, and there were three brothers beside Miriam. Sylvia envied Miriam's irresponsible existence. Miriam earned seventeen dollars a week and was allowed to keep every cent of it. Besides this boon her brothers, each in a different wholesale business, never forgot to bring home odd lengths of material, laces and ribbons. Then God, thinking it foolish to hold out on such a little thing, gave Miriam a talent for sewing. Result: a darn well-dressed file clerk.

Miriam was just twenty, and Sylvia found her at times a rather trying companion. Sylvia was twenty-

three and she was inclined to blame Miriam's youth for her silliness. A less charitable person than Sylvia might have realized that Miriam at forty would still giggle and try very earnestly to be amusing. Miriam was bleached. She'd always wanted to be a blonde, and her parents had said no; so Miriam had cried and refused food until they said yes. So Miriam was a blonde, and most people thought her very pretty.

Sylvia found her quite excited about Paul Reiselbach. Dates were not rare in the life of either Miriam or Sylvia; so Sylvia guessed that it was Paul's big car which was causing all the unusual steam.

"Do you know who Paul is?" Miriam asked, her eyes large with wonder.

"He's the mug who has the big car you were admiring when he came along and saw you, isn't he?"

"Yes, but do you know who else he is?"

"I give up. John Gilbert?"

"Don't be silly. He's the son of the department store. You know Reiselbach's department store over on Fordham Road."

"He is?"

"Yeah, ain't that great? I'm going to get him to take us some place swell."

"Not too swell, Mimi. I haven't any brothers who are wholesalers, please remember."

Sylvia was not fated to ride in Paul Reiselbach's lovely automobile. Paul's friend had an antipathy

toward rumble seats and had trailed Paul in his own modest car. Sylvia just had a flash of Paul Reiselbach. He was a tall, rather blank-looking individual who swallowed the last three words of every sentence. He mumbled something about his friend Mr. Richards, bundled Sylvia into the conservative little coupé, and bounded back to his green and yellow roadster. Sylvia watched him deposit Miriam on the leather seat; then she turned to Paul's friend, Mr. Richards.

"I brought this," he said, "because I hate rumble seats and gambled on your hating them, too."

He had a nice voice. Sylvia had a strange fancy that it was not quite real. It was a little too soothing, too disarming. She glanced at him quickly. He was extremely good-looking in a dark, well-groomed way. His appearance was like his voice. Too perfect to be an accident. What line was this Mr. Richards in, that he needed an appearance and a voice that would instantly inspire a sense of his unquestionable superiority?

"I hope," he said after a moment, "that I'm not as bad as you thought I would be."

Sylvia started guiltily. "Why—I—"

"I know. When I was at college a few girls favored me with the truth of what they always expected a blind date to be like."

College. Sylvia was ashamed of the thrill that it gave her to think that he had been at college. None of the men she knew had ever been educated past the second or third year of high school. There was a glamour about college, a bookishness.

She ventured a question. "Are you and Mr. Reiselbach inseparable friends like Miriam and me?"

"I don't know that I'd say that," he answered. "We're both too busy to see each other more than once or twice a month."

She had never met a man before in her life that she wouldn't have asked his business. But about Mr. Richards there hovered a reserve, a quiet friendly aloofness, that invited no personal questions.

"Where would you like to go?" he asked.

"Well, I'm perfectly willing to leave the choice up to Miriam. Let us just follow their lead."

"Good." He smiled, showing shining white teeth. Sylvia had known that his teeth would be perfect. He would walk well, too, with a careless, brisk jauntiness. He probably danced well.

By this stage other men whom she had met had told her how pretty she was. Some had even needed squelching by now. Mr. Richards was different. He was evidently after an evening of decent female companionship. He probably didn't even guess that his fair companion had had to sock many a venturesome gentleman.

Sylvia sighed. It would be nice, she thought, to have been born where men like Mr. Richards were all in the day's work. On the heels of her sigh came an unguarded question.

"You don't live uptown, do you?"

"Yes."

Silence.

It was a strange evening for Sylvia. She had the curious fancy that she was moving in a dream. She had always had the faculty for observing keenly and accurately what went on around her, but tonight everything was different. She felt drugged and giddy. Paul and Miriam were strange wraiths fading in and out of the picture. She saw nothing, heard nothing, but this dark, soft-spoken man who was her blind date.

She danced with him to a tune from a deceased musical show. She heard him singing the words quietly as though to himself.

"It must be love I'm dreaming of
That makes me feel this way,
It must be love I'm learning of
That started in today—"

His arms were young and strong, and he held her close as they circled the room. Sylvia noted with interest that to her the other dancers were faceless phantoms. She could see no one but her partner.

"And all the time, the strangest things I find
Keep running through the thing I call my mind,
Such words as 'turtle dove' and 'stars above,'
You see it must be love."

Sylvia smiled as he led her back to the table. Yes, it must be love. What a thing to happen to her! Funny, and yet a little tragic. She caught her breath sharply and allowed her thoughts to dwell for one sane, steadying moment upon her responsibilities. Suppose this man was to fall for her? Then what? There was Mother to think about. Mother with her childish, helpless mind and her dearly beloved heart attacks. Sylvia turned her head and tried for the moment to forget Mother and her worries. She might as well enjoy tonight.

It was midnight when Miriam decided that it was time to leave. The evening had flown, Sylvia thought. She was looking at herself again a little contemptuously. The idea of falling in love at first sight like the halfwits who wrote letters to the lovelorn columns! Still, if a man was handsome and kind and treated you decently and you weren't used to handsome, kind men who didn't try to maul you, why wouldn't he knock you all in a heap? Sylvia had a terrible feeling that if it wasn't for Mother she'd start getting romantic about this bird. Oh, hell, this wasn't love. It couldn't be love. She wasn't the kind to fall for any guy. This was just sort of a crush.

You couldn't love a guy when you didn't even kno his first name.

The modest little coupé began to trail the dashing roadster once again. Sylvia sat very silent and watched the long, thin hands of her escort turn the wheel. Would she ever see him again, she wondered.

Suddenly her eyes wandered to the road ahead. They were no longer following Paul and Miriam.

"Why, they've gotten away from us," Sylvia said.

"No, I got us away from them. Do you mind?"

"That depends," said Sylvia. She laughed a little.

"Don't be coy, Sylvia. I like you because you're not like Paul's girl friend, all simpers and baby pouts. You're different. I want to show you the place that I consider the coziest spot in the whole wide world. Look through the trees."

Sylvia looked. There was an Inn built in old English style. The trees stood grouped about it, bare but not dismal-looking. There was a hopefulness about them. They were waiting. The windows of the Inn were bright golden squares. Sylvia caught a glimpse of a huge stone fireplace. The Inn looked like pictures she had seen on Christmas cards where they spelled words funny, "Merrie" and "ye." She didn't know what pewter flagons were, but she knew they belonged there. Here was good cheer and warmth.

"I love this place," he said. "I'd like to show it to you."

Sylvia was acquainted with the "if-you-don't-you'll-walk-home" school of invitation. She knew how to cope with that. Here was something else. Here was the nicest man she had ever known. She was not apt ever to meet a nicer man. Her life had been a washout. She'd never done a single thing she'd wanted to do. Hell's bells, wasn't she good to her mother? And wasn't she fair to everybody she knew? Wasn't there something coming to her in life? Couldn't there be one little allowance made for a girl who had plenty of troubles?

The little coupé rounded a corner of hedge and she heard that soft, not quite real, voice ask, "Yes, Sylvia?"

She was glad that she could make the decision with her brain. It would be unbearable to be the type that is soft and yielding like a sap.

And there you were. That was the way things were in life. You took your fun where you found it and then went back to your job and tried to forget a tall, dark person whom you knew by the name of Mr. Richards. A strange dodo who stood beside you on a little balcony and looked at the white winter moon with you and then faded casually out of your life.

Oh, well. It was all right, only sometimes Sylvia thought she saw him and then she was a little wrought up for a minute or two. Foolish.

Miriam had a terrible tale of woe to tell. It seemed that it was just too mean of Sylvia and Mr. Richards to get away from Paul and Miriam.

"Have you seen Paul since?" Sylvia asked. It was a week now. A week. Could it really be a week?

"No, and I don't want to see him. Of all the fresh bozos I ever met. Thought he could pet with me right on the Bronx River Parkway with all them strong lights. Suppose one of my brothers should have come along and seen me?"

"And you didn't pet with him?"

"I did not. That's why he hasn't called me up. If you won't, they don't want to see you any more."

Sylvia smiled.

There really wasn't any way now of finding out more about Mr. Richards. Well, why should she want to? She'd made her decision with her level-headed little thinking apparatus, hadn't she? Now that was that. If there was anything Sylvia hated it was a whining woman. Oh, hell, what was the use of faking? Who said brain? She and forty million other dames all generous for the same reason. A reason that they used for murder, sacrifices, and plain damn foolishness—Love. Blah! What a lot of nonsense for a girl who'd been earning her own living (and her mother's) since she was fifteen!

Mother had a heart attack on an evening when Sylvia was very tired and a little peevish. She sus-

pected that her peevishness had brought on the attack. One always came on the heels of Mother's pet remark, "You'll miss me when I'm dead and gone and you have nobody to guide you and think for you."

Sylvia was really penitent when Mother began to evince all the textbook symptoms of a heart attack. After all, everybody has his own way of enjoying himself.

"Shall I call Dr. Caton, Mother?"

"No, he doesn't do me any good. I want to try a doctor Mrs. Kahn told me about. Over on the Concourse. Dr. Gordon. You'll find him in the phone book."

Sylvia knew this story well. Mother always canned a doctor who didn't take her very seriously. As she looked for Dr. Gordon's name, she hoped that he would treat Mother as though she were very ill and that he wouldn't charge more than three dollars for the call.

"He'll be right over, Mother," Sylvia said as she left the phone. "Can I get you anything?"

"No," Mother gasped. "Just let me be."

Sylvia put Mother's favorite detective story magazine within easy reach and was amused to see Mother seize it eagerly and thumb the pages till she found the one which she had turned down.

There was a tradition in Sylvia's not too tidy

house that things must be always straightened up when a doctor was coming. So Sylvia fussed about a bit, changed her dress, and came back to the living-room. The bell rang.

"There he is," said Mother with a note of eagerness in her voice.

Sylvia opened the door. For a second she stood spellbound upon the threshold regarding the tall, dark person. A little glad pulse leaped in her throat and then she saw the black bag. He had come because he was Dr. Gordon.

For a second silence hung between them. Then, "You're the doctor," said Sylvia weakly.

He smiled pleasantly. Sylvia knew that smile. "Yes," he said, "are you the young lady who phoned about your mother? Where is Mother? What seems to be her trouble?"

Dumbly Sylvia followed him down the hall. Good God, he wasn't going to recognize her! He was Dr. Gordon and this was business.

He asked many questions about Mother. In some mysterious fashion Mother had suddenly become too ill to answer for herself. She only spoke when Sylvia's answers weren't of the sort that would make this seem a serious case.

"I see," Dr. Gordon kept saying.

Presently he went away. He left a prescription on the table and a parting injunction that he was to be

called if anything unusual developed in Mother's case. Sylvia saw him to the door. He said good night in a friendly fashion. He was indeed a pleasant, charming young doctor.

Sylvia returned to her mother. She felt a little stunned. There was the sense of having gotten a God-awful crack on the jaw.

"He's awfully young," Mother said. "I wonder if he can be a good doctor. Mrs. Kahn said that he saved her Charmain from mastoids. Maybe he's all right. What did you think of him?"

"I guess he's all right. Go to sleep, Mother, I don't feel like talking."

Mother's feelings were very plainly hurt, but Sylvia couldn't do anything about it. She was sunk. She felt that if she wasn't too sensible a girl for that sort of thing she'd cry. But what was there to cry about? After all, tears are foolish. Presently she went to the bedroom and stayed there for a while. When she came out again Mother said, "You shouldn't read in the bedroom. The bulb in there is only fifteen watts. You have your eyes all red."

"Oh, tend to your heart trouble," said Sylvia cruelly.

After Mother had fallen asleep Sylvia went for a little walk. The apartment stifled her, but somehow Fordham Road didn't have the same kick tonight that it usually had for her. Felt hats marked down

to one ninety-eight awakened not the slightest interest. The movies seemed stupid places, and the little knots of boys and girls on the street corners were vapid, silly-looking things. Reiselbach's department store loomed darkly ahead, and Sylvia turned and walked home again. Why not go to bed? No point in strolling around. The first thing she knew she'd be meeting some one who'd want to take her to see some vaudeville.

The next morning she found a note in her mail box from Dr. Bernard Gordon. It was an impersonal little message asking her to call during his evening office hours. Seven to nine.

Who the devil did he think he was, asking her to call on him? If he wanted to see her, he knew where she lived. Sylvia said "I'll be damned" several times to herself.

He lived in one of the swellest apartments on the Concourse. On the first floor, of course. Sylvia saw his neat little sign, and a strange thrill set her trembling. He had achieved something. A pale yellow girl opened the door for her and led her to the waiting-room. Sylvia waited along with two other people.

Dr. Gordon's nurse came out and signaled to one of the patients. He was disposed of in five minutes. Then the second one went in, and next it was Sylvia's chance. She felt herself quivering with nervousness.

Dr. Gordon greeted her with a pleasant good evening. The nurse faded out of the picture and Bernard was explaining:

"I'm in a silly position. My parents are strict, you know. They expect lots of me. I'm supposed to be dignified and ethical and reserved. Once in a while I get away with Paul Reiselbach like I did the other night. I didn't dare speak to you last night."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm crazy about you, Sylvia. I've been trying to forget you. I've been tempted a thousand times to go see Miriam and get your address. Then last night I tried to ignore you and forget you, and then I had to write that note."

"Why all the heavy forgetting business?"

"Well, my parents, you see."

"Don't they expect you to know any girls?"

"Yes, but not little provocative girls with very red lips who keep blind dates."

"Oh, I see." Sylvia drew herself away from him. Her eyes wandered to the heavy mahogany furniture, the oriental rug. "You're the uptown society one tries so hard not to hear about, aren't you?"

He laughed. "I suppose so. Now, are you going to be a real nice little thing and pop in now and then to see me?"

"No."

Dr. Bernard Gordon was very plainly taken aback.

He looked to see if she were fooling. "Why not? Honestly, Sylvia, I'm crazy about you."

"Listen, I'm home between six and eight every night in the week. Drop in and see me if you care to. If you don't, it's O.K. with me."

"You're an independent little thing, aren't you? Please, Sylvia, be reasonable. My parents would throw a fit if I suddenly developed an interest other than medical over on Morris Avenue."

"Well, suit yourself."

She went then, leaving behind a bewildered young doctor who in what remained of his office hours prescribed some very unique remedies. Such is love, even uptown.

Half of Sylvia was very sorry that he hadn't remained Mr. Richards. Mr. Richards was the perfect man, a gentleman. Dr. Bernard Gordon was just a man to be managed, coped with, and very much like other men she had known. The only difference between him and the buyer for Keskel, Engel and Woolf was that Sylvia happened to love Dr. Gordon. Half of her had a strong suspicion that he would come back on her terms—something Mr. Richards would never have done. Funny how a good-looking chap with a soft voice can be perfect in the moonlight and just a man when seen in an office.

Bernard seemed very anxious to prove to Sylvia that he was merely human. He dropped around the

next evening while Sylvia was having her delicatessens. He came ostensibly to see Mother, but he never looked at her once.

He asked Sylvia if she would go riding with him at ten o'clock. That was the earliest that he could get around, he explained.

"What about your parents?" Sylvia asked. "Remember they expect more of you than a Morris Avenue Mamma."

"I won't tell them," he announced bravely.

Sylvia shook her head. That wasn't the kind of answer she had wanted at all. But she went riding with him and made up for her weakness by saying insulting things to the pride of the Gordons.

A week of heavy figuring on Bernard's part and of hopeless wonderment on Sylvia's part. He came for her every night and together they rode through Westchester while he talked about himself. He told her how clever he was and how important he was going to be in the medical profession. Somehow Sylvia never seemed to be impressed. She never once offered to be his permanent recreation in a nice, safe way. He feared that she never would. He feared that she didn't care much about him. This proves that Sylvia had missed her vocation. She should have been an actress.

Then one night Bernard came to her, looking white but exultant.

"I told my father," he said. "I told him, Sylvia, and it seems that he's a pretty worldly chap after all. He says he'll make it right with my mother. He saw that I had to have you, Sylvia. He says we can be married with his full consent."

"Whoa, big boy! What about my consent?"

"Sylvia!"

"Well, look here. I have to have a man who'll look out for my mother."

"Oh, that's nothing, Sylvia. I can manage that."

"But will you?"

"Gladly."

"All right, then. I guess you're about as good as I can get in the way of a husband."

And Dr. Bernard Gordon, who had always dreamed of bestowing his name upon a grateful, adoring maiden, took into his arms his promised bride—Sylvia, a hard-boiled egg.

He couldn't know, of course, that she looked over his shoulder out at the night sky and said to herself, "Gee, I guess there is Somebody up there after all."

Now, a wedding on the Concourse is no light thing, I assure you. Especially when the bridegroom is the only son of a man who has made half a million in pearl buttons. If the only son is also a doctor the wedding is still more elaborate. You can figure

on the Gerstmans being there and the Sterns and quite possibly the Goldens.

Sylvia was a little bewildered by the things that happened and the things that were expected of her. Bernard's father gave her a check to cover her expenses for a wedding-dress and accessories.

"I'm funny like that," Sylvia said. "I'd like to buy my own wedding-dress."

Mr. Gordon was a little worried about the outcome of such an undertaking. He had invited his sister all the way from Chicago, and he wanted Sylvia to have good material in her wedding-gown. His sister's husband was very apt to appraise it for the benefit of the guests.

Sylvia's boss promised to get her the veil and dress wholesale, but at the last minute he got big-hearted and charged her nothing for it.

"You should be a happy bride, Sylvia. That outfit retails at three hundred dollars. "The boss sighed heavily. "I can't afford to make gifts like this, but I like you. You were a good girl, Sylvia. I'm sorry to see you leave."

Mother was all taken care of. It had been arranged that she was to stay in her apartment. Bernard had promised to be in on every heart attack. Mother wasn't quite sure that she liked having a son-in-law who was a doctor. Still, Bernard did seem to realize that she was a very sick woman.

On the night before the wedding Sylvia and Bernard sat alone in the living-room of the Gordon apartment. There was a long table before them gleaming with silver and glass. Wedding presents. Sylvia was amused to think that the olive dish was the only thing sent by a person whom she knew. Miriam had sent it. That was a chilling thought. All these people Bernard knew were strangers to her. She turned and looked at him. The amber lamp threw its light upon them both as they sat on the divan. Sylvia felt humble and afraid of her good fortune. She loved him so.

"Well, Precious, tomorrow this time we'll be married," he said.

"Yes, nice thought, huh?"

"Love me a lot?"

"Enough."

"Is that all?"

"That's all. You've got your bad points. You're conceited, you know."

"That's only because I know you love me. That would make anybody conceited."

"Slush," said Sylvia.

Wedding day. Sylvia in Mrs. Gordon's yellow taffeta boudoir, being dressed by two very nervous ladies. Mother wasn't there. She had gone to Mrs. Kahn's to spend the day. Sylvia had suggested it

because the bower of white roses looked too good a place to throw a heart attack. Mother had looked hurt but had brightened perceptibly when Sylvia said, "Besides, there'll be so much work to do over at the Gordons'."

The wedding guests had gathered. Sylvia could hear their conversation. It came in a loud buzz through the bedroom door.

She looked at herself in the long glass. The dress was a dream. The satin glimmered with a curious hint of yellowness. Keskey Brothers were so smart they could even make wedding-dresses that looked as though they'd been handed down for a couple of generations. The headdress was a little extreme. It was Russian. The band came to a peak, and the veil, filmy and gloriously alive, did nothing that a conventional veil should do.

"You're a beautiful bride," one of the ladies said.

Sylvia thanked her prettily. She was quite pleased with herself. They led her to the dining-room and deposited her carefully upon a sofa. Nobody must see her till the last minute.

Bernard came in.

"Oh, beautiful," he cried. "You look like a dream."

"You're not so disgusting-looking yourself," said Sylvia.

"I wish they'd hurry things," he said. "I know

that I'll be called any second now to officiate at a baby having."

Sylvia laughed and reached for Bernard's hand. They sat so in silence for many seconds. Then he said, "You're so beautiful, Sylvia, and I love you so much. Sometimes I nearly go crazy when I get thinking about things."

"What things?"

"Oh, you know, a man is a worrisome devil. I often wanted to ask you, and I never dared."

"Ask me what?"

"How many dates you went out on before you met me?"

"Millions," said Sylvia complacently.

"But I mean dates that were like ours."

"Oh," said Sylvia. Her teeth cut into her lower lip. "I never was out on a date like ours, Bernard, before I met you."

He turned his head and she saw his profile, dissatisfied and a little sad.

"You'd naturally say that," he murmured.

"You don't know me," she replied.

The conversation in the other room was suddenly stilled. In a minute now—in a minute—

Sylvia stared ahead of her, thinking. Bernard didn't believe her. What would it be like to live with a man who on his wedding day was doubtful, uncertain? What would it be a year, five years, hence? His

world, his friends, his never completely routed doubts. And her loving him, loving him all the time.

But without him, what? The unknown. Where would there ever be another man whom she loved who could take care of Mother? What was her future without Bernard? There was no job now, but there would have to be one, for always there would be the cry, "Sylvia, the gas bill! The electric bill! My heart!" How could she face life without Bernard? And what would that life without him be? She couldn't guess.

But she could guess what life with Bernard would be. When an argument came up in their everyday lives it would be because Dr. Bernard Gordon had married a girl who kept blind dates. Well, she wasn't ashamed of having kept that date. The future without him—mysterious, problematical, hazardous.

The small orchestra in the foyer began to play the familiar Wagner strain. Bernard turned to Sylvia and smiled forgivingly.

"Here comes the bride, sweetheart," he said. "I love you, Sylvia. I don't give a damn whether you're lying or not."

"Don't you, Bernard?" Her eyes were wide and not quite sane as they lingered for what seemed eternities on his dark, boyish face. Presently she took a step away from him. The veil swayed for a moment in space and then followed her. Like a somnambulist

she walked toward the portières and yanked them apart. Past the Gerstmans and the Sterns she walked, slowly, yet certain of her direction. Straight toward the door she walked.

"Sylvia," Bernard came after her and caught her hand. "Where are you going?"

Her mind was on the future. That unknown span of years with its problems and dangers. She pulled her hand away from him, and in that moment there was something almost regal in the bearing of Sylvia.

"I'm going," she said, "I'm going to keep a blind date."

III. VIVIEN

The Jeer Leader

THERE was once upon a time a king who had three daughters. The first was as beautiful as moonbeams and starlight. The second was as radiantly fair as the setting sun upon azure waters. But the third and youngest was lovelier than all the flowers of the world, and her mind was as bright and quick as leaping flames.

And it was with this third daughter of the king that Vivien O'Day identified herself. At the age of six she had pictured herself as the lovely *Princess Lula,* who had outwitted the *North Wind.*

In a drafty, ill-smelling flat on First Avenue she had listened as her father had read the story aloud, and pityingly she had looked from one to the other of her sisters: Margery, freckled and scrawny; Adele, pale-eyed and with hair that hung in lusterless strings. Vivien had laughed first, then had idly kicked Adele's ankle. Her father had frowned and had raised his voice to a tone that had accorded nicely with the crescendo climax of *Princess Lula's* story:

"And her sisters kissed the hem of her skirt and forty maidens tossed roses beneath Lula's feet as she entered the chariot. All the bells in the kingdom pealed and the children sang, and for eighty days and eighty nights merriment was rife, for Princess Lula became the bride of the King of the Mountains and they lived happily ever after."

The book containing the story had long ago been lost, the flat on First Avenue had faded dimly in Vivien's memory, the good-natured, shiftless father was in his grave. But somehow in Vivien O'Day, daughter of a washerwoman and a hodcarrier, dwelt the passion to be beautiful and wise.

Adele and Margery had quit school to help with the house. Adele had become an errand girl in a modiste's shop. Margery got a job in a factory. When Vivien reached fourteen, the family looked at her questioningly, but they never asked her to leave school and help them. Tight-lipped, watery-eyed Kate O'Day continued to take in washing. The older sisters turned in their pay envelopes every week.

They lived uptown now—in a basement on Amsterdam Avenue. It was dankly cold in the winter, damply chill during the hot weather. They had moved because Kate O'Day could not bear the sight of the stairs down which Michael had been carried.

Sort of ridiculous. After all, he had been of little account.

Sometimes in the basement bedroom, which was dark though Harlem lay bathed in sunlight, Vivien sat and thought. Always her thoughts were accompanied by a steady rub-dub-rub-dub-rub-dub and the well-known splash of her mother's strong hands plunging into the soapsuds.

They thought her selfish, her mother and her sisters. They did not know that she was not like them. Not the sort to be satisfied with ignorance, a vestibule courtship, marriage with a day laborer, and a brood of ill-natured brats. They did not know of another life, where beauty and intellect save a woman from the vulgar commonplaces of life.

Some day they would gasp at the greatness of the woman who was their flesh and blood. Meanwhile, being of a different stamp than herself, they could not mind working so hard.

Often she would stand before the mirror and gaze at herself reverently. She would take the pins from her hair and it would tumble to her shoulders, to her waist, in a thick, glimmering surge of golden red. There was gold in her eyes, too. They were shining eyes. Brown with golden flecks. Sometimes she laughed.

Frank Heedy, the fellow who lived upstairs,

wanted to take her to the movies. He was a collector for a furniture house. Vivien would touch her hair caressingly and laugh at Frank Heedy's advances to a girl who would some day be—Vivien was not certain what. Something great. Something magnificent.

It was not only at Frank Heedy that she laughed. There was his sister Grace, engaged to a fellow who tinkered with wires all day and thought himself an inventor. Still, with Grace Heedy's looks she was lucky to get him.

And there were her own sisters to laugh at, if one really wanted to laugh. Margery, who was madly infatuated with a young Jew who ran a machine next to hers; and Adele, who was beginning to get crazy ideas about clothes from being around the modiste's shop. You could laugh right in the presence of these stupid creatures and they didn't know you were laughing at them. And Vivien loved to laugh.

So much did she love to laugh that her lessons suffered. At the end of four years in high school she could not honestly tell herself that she had retained one-eighth of all the knowledge that had been impartially dealt out to all. Too bad, thought Vivien, but rather a joke on the rest of the family, since they now thought her quite erudite.

Oh, well, if a girl is destined to become important, a little thing like not being terribly well educated isn't going to stand in her way.

Once out of high school, the business of contributing to the family coffers must really begin. The factory? Vivien laughed at her mother's suggestion. Fancy her working at a machine!

She answered an advertisement and went to work in an office. There was something dignified about being in an office. It impressed her family and made her mother realize that Vivien's clothes must always be kept pressed and neat.

It was in that office that Vivien met Lester Crane. He was twenty-four. There was a depressing lack of spontaneity in the things he said. He carried an umbrella and wore rubbers. He was secretary to the boss, and believed implicitly that if he followed orders faithfully and was a temperate, well-mannered young man, he would some day be a great success. And like the dear souls who stint themselves for forty years and then invest in worthless oil stock, so did Lester Crane fall senselessly in love with Vivien O'Day.

She tolerated him. After all, he made enough to buy tickets and perfume, and now and again a hat for a beautiful red head. One couldn't love him. He was too absurd. But, like her twelve-dollar job, he was a beginning.

She did not, of course, care to marry him. She spoke of her extreme youth, her family. In reality, Lester Crane was not as handsome as the man of

whom Vivien dreamed, and, besides, she was doing well at the office. Her wages had been raised a dollar. Why should she not study the business, its needs, its uses, and become a business woman?

That was it. She would work and study and become indispensable to the firm. Stenographers would scurry at her nod. Telephones and bells would jingle at her command. And, besides, there were many fascinating and wealthy men to be met in this way.

Lester Crane, too, dreamed his dreams of the day when he should be a man of note in the business world. With a little sigh one wonders how many glorious dreams were laid to eternal rest back in the dimly remembered days of 1917-18.

It was to be war. War! shouted, moaned, sung, and cried was the word of that April day.

"Of course you'll go, Lester," Vivien said.

"Of course," he echoed.

It was not till she saw him in uniform that she believed his words had meant anything. He was such a pitiful sight in uniform. So uninspiring, so weak-looking. The boss was handsome in olive drab, but Lester's Adam's apple was too prominent and his legs were ridiculous.

"I have $911 in the bank," said Lester. "I had more, but I bought this ring. I'll sign the money over to you. If I get—if I don't come back, it's yours. If I come back will you marry me?"

She said that she would marry him. It would be a lark to have a man in France. She let him slip the tiny diamond on her finger. After all, neither Adele nor Margery could say that they were engaged to a man who was fighting for his country.

Her engagement brought her prestige in the office in the days that followed. Here was a brave, loyal girl whose sweetheart was fighting in France. Vivien looked very brave and loyal when people glanced her way. Somehow the boss, though he wore his olive drab so charmingly, did not get to France. Words like "pull" and "graft" flew about the office when he made an occasional appearance.

Three girls were handling the work that Lester had done. Vivien was one of them. Once, in back of the filing cabinet, the boss had come upon her suddenly and kissed her. Vivien knew he was married, but it occurred to her that he was probably not happy with his wife.

She saw herself as a woman who would be Mr. Eldrige's love and comfort. Mr. Eldrige was a rich man. His love and comfort would probably be ensconced in a Park Avenue apartment. She would be adored by people who had never liked Mrs. Eldrige.

A half hour after he had kissed her Mr. Eldrige scolded her for not answering the phone on its first

ring. Vivien smiled bewitchingly at him, but he did not appear to notice. Vivien didn't know that he had kissed every girl in the office and that he was, even so, a thoroughgoing family man.

The Jew with whom Margery was in love had also gone to France. It was funny the way Margery cried when weeks passed without a letter. Vivien held herself up as an example to Margery. Wasn't she being brave? It seemed to Vivien that Frank Heedy was also in France. She wasn't sure. Who could be annoyed with Frank Heedy?

Sometimes she wondered how she was going to convince Lester when he came back that she was not engaged to him. If he got nasty about it she could always get nasty too, so there was really nothing to worry about.

Only, Lester never came back. Somewhere over there, poor Lester, who wore rubbers and whose Adam's apple was too prominent, gave up his insignificant little life.

Vivien bought some clothes. She had never known a girl who had as much money as she had.

She spent a hundred dollars on clothes. The family was aghast at her extravagance. Vivien laughed and told them to mind their own business.

She quit her job. Silly to be going downtown early every morning when Lester had arranged everything so nicely. The business world wasn't so nice, anyhow.

Stuffy men and stupid women. She could probably have conquered it, but the game wasn't worth the candle. Besides, she could always go back if she cared to.

Meanwhile it was pleasant to lie in bed all morning, to arise and dress in her new finery, to go to the movies or just walk about the city. It was lovely, and the crowning joy was to be able to hand mother six dollars on Saturday night so that not one of them could say that Vivien owed them anything.

She knew Billy Carter now. She'd met him at Grace Heedy's wedding. He was very good looking and seemed to have a fair position. She went about a bit with him. It was Billy she told of her desire to invest five hundred dollars in something safe. Billy promised to look into it for her.

He praised her beauty with such satisfying phrases that Adele's talk about the stage did seem so funny. Adele in the chorus of a revue was really absurd. Of course, Adele did have nice, sleek black hair, and perhaps her figure had developed more astonishingly than one could have believed; but, my dear, Adele in a show with beautiful girls!

It had all come about through an actress who had bought clothes in the shop where Adele worked. She had caught sight of the errand girl and had raved about her looks.

She had given Adele a note to a producer of ex-

travaganzas and now Adele was going to the first rehearsal of a new revue to see if she could get a job.

It was too much for Vivien. She choked on her dinner and laughed right in Adele's earnest little face.

"They'll pay forty dollars a week if they take me," said Adele.

"You'd drop dead if you saw forty dollars," laughed Vivien.

But Adele didn't drop dead when she saw forty dollars at the end of her first week with the Vogues company. It was Vivien who was thrown off balance when she saw her sister's picture in the glossy pages of a magazine above the heading, "Irish-American Beauty Dancing in the Vogues Chorus."

The war was over now. Frank Heedy and Margery's beloved were back at work. Lester Crane would never come back, but Vivien was not thinking of that. She was getting perfume and hats and even a winter coat from Billy Carter now. He had to buy things for her. He had found an investment for her five hundred dollars. If he did not keep her supplied with the things she needed she would have to go back to work. And she didn't want to go back to work.

"You're beautiful, Vivien. Why don't you go in a chorus?" It was Adele who asked—Adele, who was dumb enough to go on living in the dank basement, who still had nothing decent to wear, who turned in

twenty-five dollars a week so that her mother need no longer wash other people's clothes.

"No, thank you," Vivien responded blithely. "The chorus is my idea of hell."

"I've got a sister in the chorus of the Vogues!" Vivien said sometimes. "Poor dear, she doesn't know where her next Rolls-Royce is coming from."

Billy Carter never laughed. He knew as well as Vivien knew that Adele was a straight kid.

One day Margery married her Jew, Morris Levine. Vivien nicknamed him Mike and sat back in snug contentment and waited for the first baby to be born in the charity ward of the Harlem Hospital. Well, Margery wouldn't mind a little thing like that.

The first baby was born in a room at a sanitarium. Margery and her husband, with Adele's help, had managed to save the money.

Vivien called them improvident fools, but Margery had kissed the top of her baby's head and had had the impudence to ask Vivien if she was jealous.

Jealous! Heavens, what an idea! What was there in life for Margery? Work, more babies, and more work. While she, Vivien, was going to be— Well, she'd probably marry some tremendously wealthy man. She'd better start to look for one—she was almost twenty-three.

Herbert Ayres was the wealthy man she had her eyes on. She had flirted with him boldly as he passed

in his foreign car. He had turned about and had spoken to her. He took her out once. She saw herself married to him, managing a home, perhaps in Westchester.

"I hate dumb women," he told her during the very first hour they were together.

That pleased Vivien. Had she not an unusually quick mind? But he had spoken of Utillio's art exhibit and had asked whom she considered the best *Thaïs* she had ever heard.

Who the deuce would want to marry him, anyhow? Fancy having to talk like a character in a book to keep him interested.

It was sort of annoying to discover, after careful investigation, that Adele thought that Mary Garden was pretty much accepted as a good *Thaïs*.

It was annoying, too, to find that the five hundred dollars Billy invested for her was gone. It had proved a poor gamble.

"It's my fault, Vivie," Billy said. "I'll make the money up to you."

Vivien's gold-flecked eyes shot a quick, expectant glance at him. He read the glance.

"Sorry, darling, I haven't it in a lump, but you can have it in tens and twenties."

So Vivien got in the habit of telling Billy when her mother expected money or when she needed new

slippers or was just dying to try the latest shade of rouge.

She had not told the family about the investment. It was not their business, nor was it their business that she had no girl friend in Passaic with whom she was supposed to spend week-ends. They couldn't understand her. They never had.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter. Spring, summer— Heavens, how the months flew by! One could scarcely keep pace with time. Here was Adele doing special numbers in the current Vogues. Vivien never asked, but she sort of got the impression—from rummaging through Adele's bureau and coming across her contract—that Adele received two hundred dollars a week.

What a bank account she must have, thought Vivien. And wouldn't you know that, being what she was, Adele would prefer living in a basement to anything on earth?

It was that very night at dinner that Vivien said, "Say, Adele, don't you think it would be nice if we got out of this basement? It's really not a place for a girl who's a wow in the Vogues."

The answer came back hard and cold, like a spring that has been snapped:

"I'd have had mother in a nice place long ago if she'd go without you. I'm damned if I'm going to support a healthy sister."

After that, Vivien had no choice in the matter. She had to have Billy Carter get her a cheap little apartment uptown. She even helped mother pack. Adele was taking mother to live on Central Park West. That was funny. Fancy the washerwoman with a washerwoman of her own, and Adele—who had once lived in a place without a bathtub—luxuriating in a glittering sunken tub.

Frank Heedy came downstairs to see them the night before the O'Days separated. He begged for Vivien's future address. She gave it to him. After all, it might be fun to keep in touch with the Heedys and see what happened to them.

He asked her to marry him that night. Vivien laughed a little. Not as much as she might have laughed when she was nineteen. Fancy being married to Frank Heedy, who was still collecting for the furniture house. Why, even his mad brother-in-law who tinkered with wires was doing better than that. It was rumored that radio was going to be a big thing, and Grace Heedy's husband had designed and patented a set. Frank said that he thought his brother-in-law would soon be wealthy.

Vivien laughed. "It's coming to Grace," she said. "Fancy being married to that goop."

"Do you think it's worse than being married to me would be?" asked Frank hopefully.

"It's a tie," responded Vivien.

He wanted to kiss her when he left and she permitted it. After all, it would be something for the poor soul to remember.

Vivien and Adele parted as friends. Mrs. O'Day wept.

"I feel I'm doing wrong, leaving my youngest to shift for herself," she said.

"Don't worry, ma," Adele smiled. "She does little of that."

Vivien laughed at Adele and thumbed her nose. "Don't you wish you knew how much money Lester left me?" she asked.

"No," said Adele. "If I knew, I'd probably have had you arrested years ago for existing on invisible means."

Vivien said nothing. The show business was making Adele very fresh.

Oh, well, her own apartment wasn't so bad. Anybody could live on Central Park West if they went on the stage. Vivien was very glad that she hadn't. It allowed one so little leisure.

Her sister Margery was her first guest. Margery didn't work any more. Morris had a small shop of his own, now. His family had advanced the money. Things were looking very bright, too. And Margery was going to have another baby.

"Oh, how can you stand a baby screaming?" asked Vivien. "And another one! My dear!"

"I don't mind the baby crying," said Margery, "and I won't have to take care of the next one. Morris says we can have a colored girl. We're moving, you know. We're taking five rooms on the Grand Concourse."

"Oh, the Concourse! Of course it's nice, and all that, but it's so far uptown."

"No further than your apartment," said Margery.

Vivien cast a careless glance over the small cream-colored living-room with its near-mahogany furniture.

"This," she said, "is only temporary."

"Well, perhaps my apartment on the Concourse is, too," Margery smiled.

"Oh, don't worry about that," Vivien said reassuringly. "You'll be able to meet your rent if you're careful about your marketing and things like that."

Margery's smile changed into a grin. She was still grinning when she left. Vivien thought that living with Morris was making Margery rather foolish.

Life in the little apartment wasn't terribly amusing. Billy developed a maddening habit of dropping in and expecting dinner. He silenced her pleas of helplessness by bringing a cookbook. It was probably just as well to keep him amiable. After all, she was passing through a period of adjustment and needed his help. Soon she would shake herself free of him

and go about the business of getting somewhere in the world.

On her twenty-sixth birthday he bought her a pair of earrings. Nice ones, but plain. Couldn't have cost him much. She was twenty-six. Goodness, was it possible? Time for a girl to begin to think about really getting set in life. Of course nobody would actually want to marry Billy Carter, but it might be fun to sort of sound him out on the subject.

She perched herself on the arm of his chair and told him about Margery's children. She said that she loved children. She asked if he didn't wish sometimes that she knew his family.

Billy looked sharply at her to see if she was laughing. She was not.

"Get your things, kid," he said. "We'll go to the movies."

Of course she had been joking. Not for worlds would she have married him, but it was rather crushing to find that he was not dreaming of marrying her.

Morris Levine's business had flourished like a green bay tree. The Levines had a large apartment in the Nineties.

Vivien visited them frequently. She did enjoy speaking to Morris of his days at a machine. Too funny to see him trying to put on the dog when at heart he was just a common ghetto boy.

Poor Margery! Of course she did have a wonderful home and a car and all that. But Morris! He wasn't bad-looking, but how could anybody forget for a minute that he had been a factory hand? And Margery adored him! Well, Vivien had always known that her sisters were commoner clay than herself.

And poor little Adele, working so hard in the show business. She was not with the Vogues any more. She was with a newer revue. She had quite a big part. And as if that wasn't hard enough work, Adele was understudy to the star.

Poor little Adele, dancing her life away! Such an empty life, too. When one was old and no longer attractive, the show business had no further use for one. Vivien pitied Adele. Five hundred dollars a week she drew now. Well, too bad that couldn't last forever.

Once, all the O'Days went out to see Grace Heedy, who had married the would-be inventor. They had a home on Long Island. It seemed that there actually was money in radio. They did have a nice home and a few servants and one of those hulking, big, ugly English cars. It was his radio set that was advertised so lavishly, you know. And he hadn't changed a bit. Still a total loss.

Grace's brother, Frank, also had dinner there that evening. It was almost incredible. but he was actually

still a collector for an installment house. It seemed that his brother-in-law hadn't been able to place him anywhere in the radio plant. Frank was earning thirty-five dollars a week. Fancy that, and what in the world could be done with thirty-five dollars nowadays?

Being the same old Frank, he had the courage to propose marriage again to Vivien. She was terribly amused.

"I wrote to the address you gave me," he said. "I think I wrote five or six times. Why didn't you answer? I wanted to take you out."

"Oh, Frank, did you really want to take me out? Too bad I didn't know that." Vivien howled with laughter.

He grew a little sulky then. Vivien laughed again and walked away from him. Really, old acquaintances were too ridiculous.

Spring, summer, autumn, winter. Spring, summer— Mercy, how time flies! Let's see, how old was she now? What difference did it make? Somebody once said that a woman reaches the height of her beauty and intelligence when she is thirty. That was probably true. Meanwhile what a gorgeous life she had had. She'd hardly done a stroke of work and had had everything she wanted. Of course not a beautiful home or a car or a great amount of clothes; but then, those things only come to women who marry impos-

sible men or to those who work like the very devil.

She hadn't seen much of her family recently. The Levines were in Paris, and Adele always complained of being terribly busy when Vivien telephoned. Vivien had sympathized deeply with her. Poor Adele—so busy!

It was on a brisk, golden October morning that Vivien saw the news in the paper:

ADELE O'DAY MARRIES HARRY LA VERE

For heaven's sake! Adele married to the producer of her revue. He must have gobs of money. But there you were again. He was probably older than sin and uglier than a brick fence.

Vivien dressed carefully, preparing for a surprise visit to Adele's. She simply had to hear the details and get a look at Harry La Vere.

The elevator boy said that Miss O'Day would be back soon. She was expecting guests. Would Vivien take a seat in the foyer? Vivien sat down.

A few minutes passed and a party of four breezed in and asked for Miss O'Day. They sat down to wait. Vivien eyed them. The women were expensively turned out and the men wore their topcoats with a careless, romantic ease. Vivien opened her hand bag and looked at herself in the mirror on her rouge box. God, that hat was shabby!

Suddenly Adele was in the foyer—a starry-eyed,

smiling Adele in velvet and furs. There were roses in her arms and the breath of them mingled faintly with Adele's perfume. An attractive man in the late thirties stood at her side calling a greeting to the two couples who were waiting. Adele was lost in the little circle that closed in about her.

"Why, you old sneak you, why didn't you let a fellow know?"

"Who did the deed for you? The justice of the peace?"

"Adele, how you did lie about your feelings for that there Harry!"

"Harry, I'd like to break your neck!"

Vivien kept her seat and laughed. How silly. All this over a girl getting married. Rather common—holding a reception in the foyer. The elevator boy was even laughing. She looked his way and let her expression show him that she, too, thought it ridiculous.

"I never did see a young lady who has as many friends as that Miss O'Day," he said to Vivien.

Vivien attached herself to the group as they moved toward the elevator.

"Oh, Vivien!" said Adele, and Vivien was introduced around. She thought that rather a blight fell over the party. Was it because they realized that they'd been making fools of themselves in the foyer?

Upstairs there were drinks and telephone calls and

new guests and flowers, and Mrs. O'Day arriving at last from the stores, where she had been shopping for Adele.

The new brother-in-law was charming, but he said that Adele was both beautiful and brainy, and that was too much for Vivien. And what a fuss everybody did make over Adele. Absurd! Vivien sat alone in a corner with a cocktail and she smiled. Who would have noticed Adele, she wondered, if she, Vivien, had entered the Vogues when Adele had suggested it. Lucky for Adele that Vivien had not cared for that sort of thing.

Now here was Harry telling everybody that Adele was going to star next year. Pleasant, that. He was going to have poor little Adele working harder than ever. Well, Vivien wished Adele luck with her married life, but there was something about Harry La Vere that she, personally, didn't like at all.

A cable arrived from Margery. Congratulations. So Adele had sent Margery the news. Those two always stuck together. Birds of a feather. Vivien began to laugh. She laughed till everybody in the room stared at her. It was all terribly funny and, besides, she had drunk a great many cocktails.

Presently she left Adele's apartment. She hadn't been liked there. She decided that she was too different from the type of girl that crowd was accustomed to. She went home.

Billy was lying on the bed reading his newspaper. She had hated his having a key, but he had insisted. He followed her to the kitchen.

"I'm not staying for dinner," he said as she lifted the potato bag off the floor of the pot-and-pan closet.

"Oh, no?"

"No." He took her hand and led her into the living-room. He made her sit beside him on the couch. He lit a cigarette while she waited for him to speak.

He smoked up at the ceiling and said, "Would you think I was a terrible bum if I broke with you, Vivien?"

He did not wait for her answer.

"You see, I have a chance to go to England for the firm and I want to go. It means living over there and I thought that you'd be a good sport about it. I feel rotten, because I've taken up the best years of your life and you're not so young any more—"

Vivien was on her feet, glaring down at him with white-hot fury.

"I'm not thirty!" she cried.

"No," he admitted, "you're not. You're twenty-nine. That's young for a woman who's done something, or for one who has started something, but when you are twenty-nine and haven't adjusted yourself to being alive yet, that's different. I don't mean to hurt you, Vivie, but you know what I mean.

You've no profession, trade, or talent. You've borne no children, you've cultivated no real friends. That's why I hate to quit you."

"Oh, don't worry about me," she said.

After he had gone she sat alone in the little apartment with the hundred dollars Billy had left her. The darkness crept in through the windows and stared curiously at her.

She was thinking of Adele's apartment. They had turned on the phonograph just before she had left.

She pictured those smart, expensively perfumed women dancing in the arms of the careless, romantic-looking men. It was a nice apartment, too. It had tapestries and a Chinese rug. Yes, but who wanted to be as unhappy as Adele was going to be with that La Vere?

After a while Vivien lit the light. She pulled down the shades and went to see if any mail had come in her absence. There was something in the letter box. She turned the little key in the lock and drew out the letter. It was from Frank Heedy:

"Dear Vivien:

"Will you go with me to the annual ball of the Frederick W. Scurman Association? It will be a very nice ball. Nothing rough. Pretty high class, in fact. You can wear your best without feeling overdressed. I hope you'll come with me. Let me know right away.

"Frank S. Heedy."

Vivien threw the letter into the wastebasket and laughed. Presently she retrieved it and stopped laughing. *Twenty-nine is very old if you haven't yet started a single thing.*

"Margery," said Adele, "mother tells me that Vivien is going to have a baby."

"Yes. I'm terribly surprised."

"Well, nothing about that girl can surprise me since the day she married Frank Heedy and picked out a Bronx flat for them to live in."

"She's happy, too. Told me frankly that I married Morris before I knew my own mind and that you married Harry for money. She gets a big kick out of jeering. She says her marriage is pure romance; that, after seeing life thoroughly and turning down a dozen proposals, she's married her first love."

"Poor girl! We'll have to let her have some money now and then. I've always felt sorry for her. She's never been very bright."

"No, she hasn't; but you know, Adele, she thinks she's bright, so she's just as happy as though she were."

"I wonder?" said Adele.

IV. ANGIE

Uptown Woman

"WELL, what I say is this, and I often say it to Joe, the movie queens have an easy time of it. They don't have to do anything they don't want to do, and they got fame and fortune besides."

"Yeh, but say, I wouldn't want to be a movie queen. They seem kind of soulless to me, you know, shallow. Look at them with their divorces and dukes and Rolls-Royces. Not for me."

Mrs. Joe Lewis gazed earnestly at the speaker, Mrs. Harry McKimm. Mrs. McKimm was four foot ten inches tall and weighed a hundred and seventy pounds. Mrs. McKimm was the slightest bit cross-eyed. Mrs. McKimm's nose bore no proportionable relation to Mrs. McKimm's mouth which looked as though it had been snatched from a newborn babe.

"On the level," asked Mrs. Joe Lewis, "wouldn't you be a movie queen?"

"Not if they begged me," rejoined Mrs. McKimm; "honest, Ange, not if they begged me. I'm satisfied with Harry, and I wouldn't want to get

with a fast crowd where they might make me forget what a good fellow he is."

"Yeh, it's easy for you to be satisfied with Harry," said Mrs. Lewis; "he drives days, but look at me all alone every night."

"I know, Ange, it's hard, but look at the money there is in driving a taxi at night. Harry was saying only last night—"

The words which Harry was saying only last night were destined not to be repeated that day, for Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. McKimm, pushing their baby carriages before them, came to Fordham Road. Now Fordham Road is a busy thoroughfare. Along it street cars, taxis, and privately owned cars run with a reckless freedom. It takes concentration, and when crossing with a baby carriage, it takes luck. Baby coaches are entirely too familiar a sight to stir the gallantry of any Fordhamite.

Mrs. Lewis and Mrs. McKimm said nothing to each other while the crossing was being achieved. It was rather a rough crossing, and each of the ladies sighed relievedly when they had landed without mishap outside a United Cigar store.

"Well," said Mrs. McKimm, "I guess I'll go in the butcher shop. I don't know what to get tonight for dinner."

"How about lamb chops?" suggested Mrs. Lewis.

"They're too much trouble," returned Mrs. McKimm. "Harry likes me to take it easy."

"Well," said Mrs. Lewis, "I guess I'll go home and wake Joe up. I've got some soup on the stove for him. If it's not raining tomorrow I'll meet you in the park and we'll walk around again."

"Gee, I wish my kid was old enough to go out alone. I'm sick of walking around. Why do babies have to have sunshine and air anyhow?"

Mrs. Lewis shook her head. She didn't know why babies have to have sunshine and air anyhow. The two women stood pondering the question. Mrs. McKimm looked at her seven months old daughter as though the answer was to be found on her small, pink face. It was, as a matter of fact, but Mrs. McKimm didn't know that.

"Kids are a nuisance," said Mrs. McKimm.

"Kids!" cried Mrs. Lewis. "Why plural? Don't be wishing things on yourself."

Mrs. McKimm laughed. Not from the heart, however. She knew her business better than Mrs. Lewis knew it.

"Well, I'll see you in the park," she said.

"Good-by."

"Good-by, Ange."

Angie Lewis turned her baby carriage around and walked west on Fordham Road, looking in the shops as she passed. She saw a great many things that she

wanted. Dresses, stockings, shoes, hats. Oh, a great many things that she wanted. She did not linger before any of the windows, except one which boasted a full-length mirror. There Angie stopped. She needed her reflection to assure her that there were lovelier beings in the world than Mrs. McKimm. Interestedly she peered at herself. She saw a tall girl, a girl with an insolent slimness. It was a slimness that uptowners admire in commercial posters and never approve of in wives. Under the brim of her three-dollar cloche, Angie's eyes searched for and found themselves in the mirror. They were brown eyes and exquisitely dissonant with her red, red hair.

"Oh, brown eyes and red hair," Mrs. McKimm had gurgled when she had first discovered the color of Angie's eyes. "They say a girl with red hair and brown eyes is bound to be a belle."

"That's a lot of mahoola," Angie had said with a solid finality which had ended that topic.

She sighed now as she looked at herself in the shop's mirror. She saw plainly that she was the type who should have soft, trailing fur wraps and perhaps black crêpe de chine bedclothes. She had read about black crêpe de chine for bedclothes in the Sunday supplements. She felt that it would be a joy to pillow her red head against a black silk pillow slip. And here she was twenty years old and married to

a taxi driver. Joe was good. He was all right, but surely he could have had his food cooked by a less attractive wife. Had it been kind of him to pick the best-looking girl—

The baby woke up and began to cry. Angie leaned over the carriage and spoke to her son. (Eleven months on the twenty-sixth.) "Here, here, what's all the shooting for? Snap out of it, bozo."

The baby continued to cry.

"Hey, cut it out. You'll have the police force out. What the hell's the matter anyhow? Thank God, your old man don't holler that loud every time something peeves him. Hush, hush, darling, don't cry or Mamma will sock you with that pretty iron girder you see over there."

The baby cried. Angie began to walk again. She sang as she walked.

"Rockabye, baby, on the treetop,
Please quit your squalling
Or I'll call a cop."

Angie sang a great many verses to the baby. He closed his eyes and slept. Angie continued her walk homeward.

Her home was in an apartment building which housed some fifty families. The Lewises lived on the third floor. There was no elevator. It was the kind of house that one can find all over uptown. An im-

pressive courtyard, two entrances to the building, oodles of children screaming about the courtyard, and the inevitable moving van at the door, proclaiming that somebody had found it all too much.

Angie lifted her son out of his carriage and wrapped his blanket about him. With her free hand she captured his pillow and the small sheet upon which he had lain. Those things, incredibly enough, get stolen if left outside. With a skillful foot, Angie moved the carriage out of the way. It would stand outside the apartment until Joe had been dealt with; then, perhaps, she would take the baby out again.

She ascended the stairs. On the second floor she paused for a moment and shifted the baby to her other arm. He woke up, and his eyes on a level with Angie's looked questioningly into hers.

"We're on the Gee Dee stairs again, Sonny," Angie explained. "Going to wake the old man up."

But the "old man" was already up. Joe Lewis, clothed in trousers and undershirt, was sitting in the kitchen reading a newspaper. He was a short, thin chap with palely pleasant blue eyes. It was impossible to look at him without thinking of what he must have been three or four years earlier. The uptown sheik type. One looked at Joe Lewis and thought of tightly belted blue serge suits, dance halls, Monday matinée at the neighborhood vaudeville house, petting parties in a vestibule, hair lotions, and girls who

were far better than they should be, all things considered. Then Angie had come and the baby, and now the sheik drove a taxi and was just a short, thin chap with palely pleasant blue eyes.

He did not look up as Angie crossed through the dining-room on the way to the bedroom. She tossed the baby in his crib and slipped out of her coat. Then she unbundled the baby. He fell asleep at once.

Angie threw her hat on a chair and walked out to the kitchen. Joe looked up at her.

"Say, where's my blue shirt?" he asked. "I looked all over for it."

"Did you try the bureau drawer?" asked Angie.

"I should hope to tell you I tried the bureau drawer. Why the devil don't you lay my things out for me? Do that hereafter, will you?"

Angie laughed. "You've got a good case," she responded.

She busied herself about the kitchen. The percolator was filled and set on the gas stove. She set a place for Joe at the kitchen table. He returned to his reading.

"How was business last night?" Angie asked.

No answer. After a time Joe looked up from his paper. "What did you say?" he asked.

"How was business last night?"

"All right."

"Well, I'm broke. Bust out some money, will you?"

"Say, what do you want money for?"

Angie's eyes expressed their scorn. "I got to have my shoe laces pressed," she said. "What do you think I want money for? No kidding, Joe, give me five dollars."

"I'll see," he said. He knew very well that he would give her five dollars, but there was an amazing amount of satisfaction to be found in those two simple words, "I'll see." It was rarely that Joe Lewis got the chance to feel judicial or arbitrary.

"Come on," said Angie. "There's your soup."

Joe merely turned his chair around and he was at the table. Angie poured his coffee and he salted his soup, sniffing thoughtfully at the warm fragrance that rose out of it.

"That's one thing you can do, make soup," he remarked.

"Yeh, look at McKimm," said Angie. "I bet she gives him cream cheese and Uneedas after a hard day's driving around. I couldn't do that. I know a fellow wants to eat."

"What he sticks to her for anyhow is beyond me," Joe went on. "Holy Gees, she's got a face that'd turn milk sour."

"Maybe she's got a sweet disposition," said Angie.

"Well, maybe," Joe admitted.

As Angie often said, Joe wasn't a great talker. He finished his soup and ate a charlotte russe without saying any more. He smoked a cigarette while Angie cleared up the dishes.

"Come on," he said after a time, "get me my blue shirt, baby." As he spoke he dug from his pocket a slim roll of bills. He laid five dollars on the kitchen table. Angie took it and left the kitchen, singing softly.

"The dance is ended
But the melody lingers on,
Oh, the melody lingers on—"

Once the blue shirt was located in the very top of Joe's bureau drawer, his departure was only a matter of seconds.

"Well," he said. He always said "Well" when he was leaving. He kissed Angie perfunctorily and went in to take a look at the baby.

"Gee, he's getting big," said Joe.

"No kidding," Angie returned. "I thought they got smaller as they grew older."

Joe gave Angie a playful push and went whistling out of the apartment. Angie walked to the window and looked out at the street below. Should she take the kid out again for a while? He was asleep. Why disturb him? She decided that she would not take him out again. She opened the window. Joe was just stepping into the courtyard.

"Joe, oh, Joe! Put the baby carriage down the cellar, will you? I'm not going out again."

Joe looked up at her. "Put the carriage away?" he asked. "Don't be a nut, it's nice out. Take another walk."

"No, I don't want to."

"A walk will do you good."

"Well, I've been done good till my feet are swollen. I said put the carriage away."

The neighbors were not surprised when Joe finally put the carriage down the cellar.

Angie looked at the clock. It was four-thirty. She picked up a book and went to sit in the morris chair. If the kid was still sleeping at five-thirty she would wake him up and bathe him and they'd have some soup together.

The kid slept till five-thirty. After all he was a good kid. Looked cute in his bath, too. Guess Joe was right, the kid was getting big. Angie heated the soup and she and the baby had their dinner. The baby had most of his on his bib, but even allowing for wear and tear, Angie managed to get a tremendous amount of soup where it would do the most good. By six-thirty the kid was sleeping again.

Some nights Angie went to the movies while the kid was sleeping. This was not one of those nights.

Tonight she changed her dress and combed her hair carefully. She put on the black velvet dress, the

one she had bought for Fanny Dolan's party the year before the baby was born. It was a nice dress, so nice that Angie rarely had a chance to wear it. Well, she would wear it this evening.

It seemed to her that her hair waved with extreme eagerness and good humor tonight. She felt that she looked very lovely. She went around trying all the chairs to see which was the best background for the velvet dress.

Presently the bell rang. Angie went to the door. Her heart was pounding with a frightened delight. She looked around her fearfully, then opened the door.

"Hello, Mort," she said.

Morton Roberts stepped into the apartment and the door was closed quietly behind him. He was a tall man. He was a good-looking man. He and Mrs. Joe Lewis made a very attractive picture as they stood locked in each other's arms.

Angie drew herself out of the embrace and led the way into the front room.

"Well, how are you?" asked Mort as he threw himself into a chair.

"I'm fine," said Angie. She was embarrassed now. She was always embarrassed during the first half hour they were together. She dared not let a silence fall. The silences were worst of all. "I walked around all day with the kid," she said. "I just gave

him his dinner and put him to bed a little while ago. How are you?"

"As well as can be expected," he replied, "seeing that I haven't laid eyes on you in three days."

"Yeh, I'll bet you grieved a lot," scoffed Angie.

"I haven't given a civil word to a soul," he continued. "I've been absolutely tortured with the thought that perhaps you'd grown tired of seeing me."

"Swell chance."

"Well, how am I to know?"

"I'll tell you when I'm through with you."

"But don't ever be through with me, Angel. I wouldn't be able to bear it."

Now that was the sort of thing that puzzled Angie. How were you to take a guy that said things like that? Was he kidding you? If Joe said it, the answer to it was "The hell you say" or "Soft music, dearie." But when Morton Roberts said it, well—

In fact Morton Roberts had puzzled Angie since their first meeting. He had the apartment across the hall from hers. His was a kitchenette arrangement. He'd only been there two months. One evening he had rung her bell and asked her how to broil a steak. Angie had been amused. It never occurred to her that perhaps Morton Roberts wouldn't have rung that bell had he not seen her on the stairs for the first time that morning. She had not an abnormal amount

of conceit, but she thought that Morton Roberts must have been pleasantly surprised when she, all flushed and bare-armed from a romp with a dozen and a half diapers, opened the door. Suspicion had not even entered Angie's mind when, after social relations had been firmly established, he had coped with the steak in quite a workmanlike manner.

He came to know something of her during that first hour. It was a relief to find some one who could sympathize with her loneliness. Other people always reminded her that Joe made more money than other fellows who drove in the daytime. Morton Roberts had been horrified at Joe's selfishness.

The baby had been sleeping soundly, and Angie had consented to go for a little walk with Mr. Roberts. After the walk she had asked him into her living-room. It had all been quite proper except that she hadn't told Joe anything about it. It was still all quite proper, Angie assured herself frequently. She did, of course, leave notes in Morton's mail box, and they had fallen into the habit of petting. But everybody pets nowadays, and besides, Morton had assured her that any man who has a pretty wife ought to think enough of her to stay home nights.

Not that Morton Roberts was a villain. Please believe that Morton Roberts wasn't a villain. He was just a human being like your man or mine. He didn't know Joe and he did know Angie, and if it was

encouragement the man was after—well, the uptown woman has that down to a science.

And now these two, the taxi driver's wife and the bored advertising agent for Selkington's Silkysuds Soap, surveyed each other in silence.

Presently Morton spoke. "You are the most beautiful thing alive," he said.

"Oh, go on," said Angie.

She was sitting on the sofa. Morton came over and sat beside her. He took her hand. "Darling," he said, "why do you turn that unbelieving, withholding side to me? Don't you know I love you?"

"I'll bet you've said that to a lot of women," Angie smiled.

"Sorry I strike you as a light lover." Morton looked hurt now. To Angie it seemed that he was just on the point of taking himself out of her life. She couldn't quite bear that. After all, he was a darling. He had brought her some flowers. They were lying disconsolately on the table. She would put them in water now and admire them. That ought to cheer Morton up. She wouldn't tell him that, as usual, she would have to put them on the dumbwaiter before Joe came home.

"These are marv'," she said. "Thanks a lot." She jumped to her feet as she spoke, and instantly Morton had her in his arms.

"Oh, you beautiful, lovely thing," he said. "Darling, darling, darling, darling."

"'Said the Chinese nightingale,'" answered Angie. Morton had read her that poem on his last visit.

"Angie," he demanded, suddenly, "have you ever heard the music of the spheres?"

Angie's eyebrows drew together sharply. "Now I mean, is this bozo crazy?" they seemed to say.

"The music of what?"

"The spheres. Happy people hear it, Angel. You've never been really happy if you haven't heard it. It's sweetly painful, dizzyingly beautiful. Oh, beloved—" He drew her close in a sudden fierce embrace, and Joe Lewis, Jr., in the other room, began to cry.

"There goes Mother's little liability," said Angie.

She drew herself away from Morton and went into the bedroom. He followed her. Angie switched on the light and looked swiftly around. It would be terrible if there were any evidences of Joe. The sight of his pajamas would be vaguely obscene, she thought. The baby held his arms out to her, begging to be picked up. Angie picked him up. No evidences of Joe around, she thought relievedly.

Morton watched her as she walked back and forth between her vanity table and the bureau. She sang to the baby and laughed at his cries. Morton was in-

terested. He had seen other women put babies to sleep. It had never failed to awaken a sense of intrusion within him, a sense of having blundered upon something remote and sacred. This was different. Other women seemed to take their motherhood straight. Here was a woman laughing when the baby's cries grew piercing, singing strange, extemporaneous ditties.

"Hush, little baby, don't you cry,
You'll drive a taxi by and by.
Sleep, baby, sleep, close your bright eyes,
Daddy will bring to us new alibis."

At the vanity table, the baby reached out a chubby hand for a bottle of liquid nail polish. Angie handed it to him.

"Won't he spill that?" asked Morton.

"Suppose he does? He won't drink it, and anything else I can fix."

Morton shook his head. He looked at Angie curiously. She was a strange one all right. Oh, well, an uptown woman was the Fordham Road party crasher of yesterday. Fellows married them, took them with their Woolworth jewelry and nine-dollar dresses for better or worse. These same party crashers inevitably become mothers, and their kids are raised catch-as-catch-can. For a moment Morton sweltered in the warmth of self-satisfaction. How clever he had been to be born in one of the better,

more exclusive suburbs! Then he looked at Angie and he wasn't so sure. He didn't want any kids anyhow, so how could it possibly matter to him what sort of mother she made. She was beautiful and her lips made him think of sun-warmed cherries.

The baby had fallen asleep. Morton was glad. Angie plopped her son into his crib and removed the bottle of nail polish from his hands without the sly carefulness Morton expected.

"You'll wake him up," he whispered.

"No, he's use to me," Angie replied in her normal speaking voice.

They returned to the living-room.

"It's a good thing he can't talk yet," she said. "When he starts to talk, you'll have to quit coming here. He'd tell Joe."

"Perhaps I'll have to quit coming here before that," he said, sadly.

"How come?"

"Well, it's like this, darling. My uncle, the Honorable Henry Selkington of the Selkington Silkysuds Soap Company, has not been exactly dazzled by my advertising genius. He would like to have a little talk with me about what he rudely terms my flop. And the gentleman lives in California."

"Oh, you mean you're getting canned?" Angie's distressed eyes traveled swiftly to the flowers on the table. "Then you mustn't bring me—I mean don't—

Well, you know, money counts if you can see the end of your job."

Morton laughed delightedly and patted her hand. "You darling," he said. "Don't worry about me. I have some money. God knows it's not much, but it's enough to see me through a lot. I think, though, that I will have to go to see the old gentleman."

"When?"

"In a week or two. Angie, don't let me go without having heard the music of the spheres together."

"Well, that's a new way of saying the same old thing," said Angie contemplatively.

"Don't hide your sweet thoughts behind banalities," Morton begged.

They sat and looked at each other, and suddenly Morton knew something that he hadn't known before. It was going to take time to forget this woman. Her beauty, her wonderful realness, her impulsiveness. She wasn't like the women he had met in the suburbs nor in the thronged streets of big cities. She was new and rich in possibilities, like her section of town. Region of pianolas, grocer's calendars, and two-dollar gin. Land of the delicatessen-fed husband, the movies every night, and the lease-breaking party. Cheap and yet with unexpected dignity, the dignity of consistency and conformity. It would take time to forget this uptown woman, and Morton Roberts had forgotten many women.

"Come with me when I go."

He had not spoken the words. They had been voiced by a desire greater than he was conscious of. Once they had been said, had become something to deal with, he knew that he wanted her to say yes.

"Oh, Mort." She was shocked.

"What's the matter, darling?"

"I couldn't go with you."

"Why not?"

"What would I do when you didn't want me any more?"

"I'd always want you."

She shook her head. "No, you wouldn't. Maybe you think so now, but you'd get tired of me."

"No, Joe would divorce you—I'd pay for the divorce—and we could be married." He drew her into his arms and murmured against her lips. "You'll go with me, sweetheart." Then quickly he kissed her lest she spoil the beautiful moment with argument.

"I couldn't go, Morton," she said when he had released her, "but thank you for asking me, for liking me enough to ask me." There was a sudden new tenderness in her tone. Her eyes looked thoughtful. She was overawed by his plea. Joe's asking her to marry him hadn't been like this. Joe hadn't been taking on the responsibility that Morton was begging to shoulder. It made her silent and wondering. She

didn't know any ready-made quip that fitted the situation.

"You'd better go now, Morton. I think we're a little crazy tonight."

"I've been crazy since first I saw you, adorable one."

"No, no, Mort. Please don't make love to me. Go home."

He went, satisfying himself with kissing her finger tips in parting. When the door closed behind him, she kissed her finger tips where he had kissed them. No man before had ever kissed her hand. Morton Roberts was romance, intrigue, and reckless love. Angie Lewis sat down and told herself that she, whom Joe gave sullen answers to, was the woman Morton Roberts had chosen to love. He loved her, and if she wished, she could shake herself free of Joe and his sulks and fly with her romance to a warm and glittering land.

She had been in bed but an hour when Joe came in. She pretended to be asleep. She wanted to preserve her dreams from contact with Joe's complaints about stingy women, drunks, and the news in Ben's Coffee Pot.

It rained the next day and Angie could not take the baby walking. She sat about the house, thinking.

"Say, what's the matter with you?" Joe asked. "You act like you got bad news."

"I got a headache."

"Well, take something for it."

"Make me an offer," Angie joked listlessly.

After he had gone, she made an effort to read, but nothing claimed her attention. She felt that nothing ever would again.

And nothing did until two nights later when Morton paid her another visit. It was a short one. He had a long letter to write to his uncle which had to be sent that night. He spoke again of Angie's accompanying him when he left New York.

"I can't," she said. "I can't."

"You will because I want you to so badly," and Morton was amazed that he really did want it so badly.

She left no more letters in his mail box. She felt that she could not see him again and still refuse him. He offered so much which she had not known she wanted until his offer came.

A week passed. She had decided to let him go without seeing him again. He could not leave a note for her lest Joe get it, and he could not visit without preparation, fearing that Joe might be at home.

Then one day Joe's blue shirt—no, it was his tan one this time—took a hand in the matter. It couldn't be found. Angie, coming in from her walk with the baby, was greeted by Joe in a high temper.

"How the devil is it I never can find anything?"

"Because you're too dumb to see it when it's where it belongs."

"All right. I'm too dumb. You've had plenty of time to find that out. Why the hell don't you lay my things out for me like I asked you to?"

"What do you think I am, a servant?"

"How could I think that? What do you ever do?"

"Plenty while you're driving your tin can around town."

"Plenty of what?"

"Now get your damn shirt yourself. I was going to get it, but now I won't."

And quite unexpectedly Angie broke into tears. Joe had never seen her cry during an argument before. He was amazed. This wasn't her line at all, to bawl over a few friendly words. If she had thrown something he wouldn't have been surprised—but tears!

"Say, what the hell are you bawling about?"

Angie rushed wordlessly past him and flung herself face downward on the bed. Joe found his tan shirt and went off to his cab, still quite mystified. He couldn't know, of course, that it seemed infinitely sad to Angie that she who was beloved by Morton Roberts had to stand for such talk from Joe Lewis.

Presently she stopped crying. She went to the mirror and looked at herself. Quite interestedly she gazed upon the spectacle of a beautiful woman who

was throwing herself away upon an uncouth hack driver. And just to think there was a man who was worth a hundred like Joe Lewis who was heart-hungry for her. This thought made Angie's eyes refill. Poor Morton and poor Angie with their lovely, promising lives wrecked. She decided to see Morton once more. She needed his assurance that he would love her always.

She went to the dish closet for a pencil. Angie always kept pencils in the dish closet. She would leave a letter in his mail box, and he would come to her without question or delay, soft-voiced and endearing.

The bell rang. Angie opened the door, and Morton Roberts caught her in his arms.

"Darling," he said, "I've had my door ajar for eternities, watching for Joe to go to work."

"Oh, Morton." She was crying on his shoulder. He was so sweet, so much all that she wanted. He kissed her eyes and pleaded with her to stop crying.

"Angie, I'm like a madman. I've had a wire from the coast. I must go tonight. Why haven't you let me see you? Darling, you must come with me. I can't face tomorrow's light without you."

For answer she wept.

"You'll come. Angie darling, say you'll come."

"I'll come, Morton sweetheart, I'd go anywhere in the world with you."

He held her passively for a moment, then gravely stooped and kissed her mouth. She found herself in a sort of daze. There was little said between them. Promises, hopes, and fears were worded with dim vagueness. The world had stopped with Angie's promise that she would go.

Then he was speaking of railroad tickets, a stateroom, packing. He was kissing her again and begging her not to weep any more. She would always be happy after this, he promised.

She was astonished to find herself alone. Astonished and fearful. He had gone to make arrangements for the breaking of her marriage vows. Railroad tickets and a stateroom.

The fear and astonishment passed within the hour, and the glorious sensation of freedom and happiness came over her. She was going to have Morton and his loving kindness for evermore. He was coming back for her an hour before train time. There were things he had to do downtown. He had surrendered the keys of his apartment, which had been rented to him furnished. She wished he had remained with her till the zero hour, but there were things that he had to attend to. Railroad tickets and a stateroom. But he would come for her.

And at the appointed hour, Morton Roberts came for the last time into the apartment leased and supported by Joe Lewis. He found Angie waiting for

him. She had her coat on, and a sea-green hat beneath the brim of which tiny crescents of red gleamed dully. A lovely Angie. An Angie with glowing eyes and flushed cheeks, an Angie with two suitcases and her baby in her arms.

"Look, Mort, I put his knitted sweater on. Do you think he'll be warm enough?"

Mort looked. "Angie," he said, "you can't take the baby."

"What do you mean, I can't take the baby?"

"Why, I wired my uncle I'd just been married. Besides, Angie, do you think you can find a reckless, gay happiness with your child pulling at your skirts?"

Angie rested Joe Jr.'s sixteen pounds upon the table. She faced Morton.

"Let me get this right," she said, slowly. "You don't want the kid?"

"Don't put it like that, Angie, that's brutal. Your child will be better off with Joe."

"Did you think I'd leave him? Did you think I was an alley cat that gave birth without noticing it and got up and walked away without caring how my kid was fed or treated or anything?"

"Oh, Angie, don't be difficult. After all, did you ever give me any cause to think that you adored your baby?"

"Cause? Good God, what do you suppose I tramp around all day with a baby carriage for? Do I like

to stand three hours in the street on a freezing day? The doctor told me it was good for the kid and I do it. Do you think because I don't talk mushy to my kid that I got a heart like a hunk of ice? I could tell you now that if the day ever comes when that kid stops being, that you'll find Angie Lewis in the Harlem River, but I'm not the kind that raves over a kid. Actions speak louder than words. I *do* for him, and if you think you are or ever were one, two, three in comparison with that little dodo of mine, you're crazy!"

"Angie, I love you. He doesn't even know of your existence yet. He wouldn't miss you."

"He doesn't know of my existence? Maybe not. But he knows when his tummy's full and when his diaper's dry and when his body's clean. That's something, isn't it? And you'd take that from him? I never dreamed that you'd try. You're a fine bozo, Morton Roberts."

"Angie, I want you."

"Kid and all?"

"Oh, darling, my uncle—"

"To hell with your uncle and with you, too."

"But I want you."

"Oh, I know that. But the kid and me are taking off our wraps and unpacking. And by the way, haven't you a train to catch?"

"Angel, please—"

"Don't 'Angel' me. I'm through. Any bird that don't want my baby can choose his exit. As though I could be happy without him. But you wouldn't care whether I was dying for him or not so long as you was listening to the music of the spheres. The hell with you, you're low enough to kick a worm in the knee."

"Angel—"

"Bologna," said Angel, and Mr. Morton Roberts walked out of the apartment and slammed the door behind him.

"Can you beat that guy?" Angie asked the baby as she undressed him and put him back in his crib. "What a crust, getting the idea that he was the whole show. Here now, Big Shot, let go of your old lady's hair. I'll be damned, all men are alike, they think they can have everything their own way."

Next Angie unpacked and returned the familiar garments and small articles to their familiar places. She had just replaced the suitcases under the bed when the door opened and Joe came in.

"Hello, honey," he said. "Still mad?"

"Boy, you'll never know how mad I am."

"At me?"

"No, not at you. At me."

Joe handed her two bags. "Sandwiches and a coffee ring," he explained. "I came home early thinking

maybe we'd have some coffee and a little light conversation."

"Yeh, I see you're home early."

"Well, you've been acting funny lately. I guess maybe you were dying of lonesomeness. I'm going on day work tomorrow. Home every night at seven. Swell?"

"You said it, Joe."

"But say, Ange, maybe it won't pay so good as the nights."

"Who cares?"

"I don't if you don't. Make some coffee, huh?"

Joe threw his overcoat and hat across a chair and suddenly dived in his pocket. "Look," he said, "I brought the kid something."

He fished out a small, cotton-stuffed pickaninny. "Think he'll like that?"

"Sure. Say, Joe, you think the kid's great stuff, don't you?"

"Yeh, don't you?"

"Oh, he's all right. Say, Joe, gee, I'm glad you're going on the day shift."

V. GAIL

The Woman Who Passed By

And one didn't do any business. That was the devil of it. Hundreds of dollars spent on that glittering white-tiled room with its silver dazzle of instruments. Hundreds of dollars spent on that tasteful rose-colored reception-room with its large divans, gracious, comfortable chairs, and enticing, up-to-date magazines. Years of youth, thousands of dollars, all gone, in order that he might put a tiny, unassuming sign in the window:

DR. WARREN STERN

He lighted a cigarette and gazed moodily down at the street. His office hours. For a second a slight smile settled on his face. There was his car at the curb—a good car—an impressive car.

He hadn't been cheap in any way. He had determined to put himself across in the neat, quiet, conservative manner that is far more expensive than ostentatious flash.

He hadn't failed, so far. Only a few months had elapsed since the sign had gone in the window. It took time, of course, to attract a practice. But he was bored waiting.

His mother came into the room without knocking. He made a mental note that, when business picked up, he must forbid her to do this. It would be absurd to tell her now.

He waited for her to speak. He was not curious about her errand. She, too, looked out the window at the handsome car, and he looked at her in the meantime.

The Sterns had always been considered a good-looking family. He thought of this as he surveyed his mother's strong, dark face. She was under fifty and had been a widow for ten years. His straight features had come from her, and his gray eyes, which were even a trifle colder and more searching.

"Mrs. Helman called," she said after a time. "Her leg's bothering her again today. She can't walk."

Warren threw his cigarette on the tray.

"Why doesn't she go to a clinic?" he asked.

His mother's tone was apologetic.

"She's been my friend for twenty years," she said. "I thought you might look at her again. Don't you expect to do any work for poor people?"

"Sure—plenty of it. But not for people like her. She can afford to pay."

"She's been my friend for twenty years," repeated Mrs. Stern.

"Well, let her call somebody else, if you don't want me to send her a bill."

Mrs. Stern returned to the kitchen, where she was baking a cake. Warren would go to see Mrs. Helman. It had been necessary only to tell him that Mrs. Helman needed him.

Warren would go to Mrs. Helman, and he would do everything else that his mother instructed. Hadn't she put him in business? He'd be a ribbon salesman, probably, if he hadn't had his mother to start him out right.

The cake rose satisfactorily to beautiful golden heights, and the clock struck two.

Warren swung past the kitchen door, his hat set at a decent, circumspect angle, and his leather bag in his hand. His office hours were over and he was going to Mrs. Helman's.

His mother went into the hall.

"The Ryders are coming for dinner tonight," she said.

Warren frowned.

"Why don't you give up throwing that girl at me?" he asked. "She doesn't care for me and I don't care for her. Her mother and you make me ill with your romantic maneuvers."

Mrs. Stern sighed.

"We old people can't resist our match-making urge," she said.

"And they talk about youth being sentimental!"

Warren flung open the door with a quick, irritable jerk and left his mother alone.

She smiled. Accused of being romantic and sentimental! Naomi Ryder's father had half a million dollars, and Warren could see only a sickly sentimentality in her urge to mate them. Yes, indeed; they do talk about youth being sentimental.

The Ryders lived on Fort Washington Avenue. Warren passed their apartment-house as he drove toward Mrs. Helman, who lived in a poorer neighborhood. The Ryders had a ten-room apartment. He had visited them. They had an expensive reproducing piano; a thousand-dollar radio set; four servants; uptown society.

Mr. Ryder was illiterate and ill-mannered. Mrs. Ryder used French phrases and talked of "refined" people.

Naomi, their daughter—Warren Stern frowned—Naomi, their daughter, was being flung at him. She wasn't pursuing him. She didn't want him. But her parents seemed to think it would be nice to have a young and presentable son-in-law who had the letters M.D. after his name. Those letters seemed to carry assurance and give something that mere money withheld.

In this particular matter Warren's mother was as bad as the Ryders; only, her fault was sentimentality. She wanted romance for him. And he didn't want romance. Time to be romantic later, when he was an established physician.

He repeated those words to his mother as they sat in the living-room that evening awaiting the Ryders.

She looked at him coldly.

"You're very inconsiderate," she said.

"Not at all. There is a chance, you know, that the girl I choose will be as likable as Naomi."

No use using strategy and sly hints on this boy of hers. Let him have it straight.

"Don't be a fool," she said sharply. "It takes time to build a practice—much time. Can I support the house for years more while you test ideals first? Already I need the money back that I spent on you. The Ryders have money and good connections. As Ryder's son-in-law you'll do business. He'll see to that."

"But she doesn't want me."

"She knows what her parents want, and she's no fool. They want a young and a handsome man for Naomi, so that they can show they could afford to have their daughter marry for love. They want you."

Warren hadn't considered the Ryders' money in relation to himself. Ryder would be a big help to him. A filthy thing to do—this marrying for money

and connections. But a man could make it a little less filthy by being almost square with the girl. He wouldn't claim to be madly in love with her.

Good heavens—the Ryders! But still, suppose he never built up a practice. The Heights had grown. There were many doctors now. Some would fail. Suppose he should be one of them? There was a chance of it, unless he had connections that would put him over.

People would hear of him through Ryder. A doctor was a business man. He had to live and had to pay his debts. He wouldn't make Naomi think that he adored her. That would be a little too rough.

When the Ryders arrived, he shuddered a little. Mrs. Ryder was in royal purple, with a huge diamond on what, in her youth, had been her breast. Mr. Ryder boomed crude layman's jests about the profession.

Naomi was a cool and lovely vision in contrast. She was small and slim. There was faintly golden skin and wavy dark hair, but one saw only her eyes—great, dark eyes that followed one reproachfully, Warren thought.

How awful! Great, dark eyes that were on you—and you knew they were on you—while you talked politics to her father; while you concentrated on your salad; while you carefully avoided her face as you sat alone with her in the music-room.

"Naomi, I know you don't love me. I have no illusions about that. We belong to a generation that doesn't have to wait till middle age to see the wisdom of a marriage that is not dripping with sentimentality or burning with ardor. Respect and admiration are everything. Without them love has failed a million times. I think we could be a pair of devoted comrades. Would you marry me without loving me?"

"You mean," said Naomi, "would I marry you knowing that you did not love me?"

Warren squirmed. Damn the girl! He thought his speech had been clever.

She did not wait for his answer. She spoke again, slowly and somewhat wearily.

"Yes, I'll marry you," she said. "We'll make a charming couple for the world to see. No one will ever know that we married without love."

She laughed throatily and repeated her words—"without love."

"Don't laugh," he said sharply.

He hadn't meant to say that. Why shouldn't she laugh?

"It sounds like the title of a Laura Jean Libbey book," said Naomi. And, as though she rather fancied the words, she said again, "Without love."

And all the time her eyes were huge, lambent, and reproachful.

And this was the sort of thing that happened to a

fellow! Who was stupid enough to say there was no God, when every day He was proving His existence and His power by things like this?

A fellow who has never loved a soul in his life decides to marry for money. The engagement is announced, he banks a pre-wedding present from his future father-in-law that is sufficiently generous to make a young man happy; the wedding day is set; everything is fixed so that there can be no reconsidering. And then he meets a girl whom he loves. Truly, atheism is the optimistic philosophy.

Her name was Gail Garsten. She lived in a two-room-and-kitchenette apartment on the corner of One Hundred and Seventy-ninth Street and Broadway. She had hair the color of burnished brass, and a wide mouth that showed clean, strong teeth as white as a savage's.

One never saw her fully dressed. She went around the apartment in a black silk kimono and shining red sandals and ankles *au naturel*. Her hair hung on her shoulder. It was thick, lush, and the fragrance of woodlands rose out of it.

Her apartment was dusty and dark. A bookcase bulged and spilled its overflow upon the floor. The lamp-shades sat at crazy angles. Some one had burned a hole in the rug. Over the piano hung a mirror with a cracked face. A ship's model worth hundreds of dollars stood in a corner on a case of champagne.

She had called Dr. Stern for a cold that was sitting stubbornly on her chest. She had tried two other doctors first. Neither of them had been at home, and when Gail made up her mind to anything, she wanted action. Dr. Stern had come at once.

From the bedroom she had shouted, "Come in." And he had found her, hot with fever, propped against the pillows, with her blazing hair that hid the woodlands and her eyes of night-sky blue.

That had been his first visit. He made two others while she was still in bed. He shuddered to think how many he had made since she had been well enough to wander around in her narrow red sandals.

He wondered about her; and she, knowing that he wondered, laughed at his distress. A woman alone, with no visible means of support. Often, over cigarettes and strong hot tea, he almost asked her—but never quite. It was with relief that he found her book, one day, upon the untuned piano:

PAN ON THE HIGHWAYS

by

Gail Garsten

"Oh, you write," he said.

She smiled at him mockingly. "Yes, a little," she replied.

She never talked about herself. If she had, she would have mentioned that her play, *When the*

Bough Breaks, had opened the preceding night at a Broadway theater.

And the days rolled on. Three weeks more and he would be married to Naomi—to the Ryders. There would be patients then. There would be all a man needs in life, or has a right to ask.

But there would be Gail swinging her red-sandaled feet carelessly; Gail in her dusty apartment where dwelt nothing that a man had the face to ask for, but all that he wanted; Gail with the gleaming hair and generous lips.

He couldn't live without Gail. He couldn't jilt Naomi.

He would have his cake and eat it too. Lots of men did it. He would marry Naomi with all the pomp that she desired. He would promise anything at the altar, promise anything, if only, when it was over, they would let him steal away up three flights of unscrubbed stairs to the apartment where Gail lived in a black kimono, majestically supercilious of white satin and its significance.

Naomi knew that his patients were beginning to gather. Her father always reported when he had had an opportunity to send some one to Warren. She never inquired about them.

Warren observed this, and was reassured. She was a good kid—new generation: "You go your way and I'll go mine!"

It would be a good marriage, after all. A bit weak at the foundations, perhaps.

Bunk! He knew he was trying to convince himself that his marriage would be like a million others. It wouldn't be. It would be hell. Naomi, the Ryders, family gatherings, his mother proud of what she had achieved—and Gail alone, locked away from the rest of the world. Hell!

His mother walked around, beaming on the world, trying to take everybody into her heart and do as well for them as she had done for her son. He almost hated her. He rushed from her to Gail, who would not nag him about the tailor and the jeweler and the florist.

Once, when he had forgotten his surroundings and had drifted away from reality, his mother had given him a sharp call back to earth and playfully told him not to think so much of Naomi. Naomi? God, what nerve she had! She who had coldly plotted with him now pretended to think it a love match.

The eve of his wedding he spent with Naomi and her parents. At ten o'clock he was dismissed with a sickeningly coy reminder from Mrs. Ryder that Naomi had to arise early in the morning.

He went to Gail's. She would be ready for a guest or an earthquake. Gail was calm and *there*. She would be drinking coffee, perhaps, or scribbling, with her

hair in mad disorder and fifty cigarette stubs on the tray beside her.

She opened the door for him and put her arms around him. He felt that he could die happily at that moment in a place away from giggling Heights Babbitts and the inevitable wedding jokes. Her lips were fragrant and sweet. There was a lump in his throat, a desire to sink to his knees and beg her to find a way out for him—for them.

She broke away from him, and he followed her into the room that he had known so well. For a moment he did not know what had happened. Then with a swift, painful clarity he saw it all: barrels filled with paper-wrapped dishes; boxes heavy with books; the cracked-faced mirror standing in a corner; the lamp-shades surrounded with paper; the ship's model wrapped and tied.

"You're moving?" he gasped.

"Yes; tomorrow."

"Where?"

"These things are going to storage. I'm taking a trip to Europe. I don't like the Heights. I'm going to be rich, they say. My play is going well."

Idiotically he seized upon the least important part of her speech and repeated it:

"You don't like the Heights."

She smiled wryly. "Too many weddings."

"Gail, don't go. I won't be able to stand it if you're not here! How can I get through tomorrow and the thousands of days to follow if I'm not able to run to you for an hour now and then?"

"You'll get through, darling," she said.

He touched her hair as she bent to tighten a cord on the ship's model.

She was going away. An ocean would lie between them. Some one else would live in the little apartment, and there would be no rest, no harbor for him.

She raised her mouth to him, and he seized her roughly and kissed her. It was good-by. A closed incident.

She had only been brought into his life to make him totally unfit for contentment with Naomi—a brief, life-wrecking interlude. Who could be stupid enough to doubt the existence of an avenging God?

Flowers. Crushing, depressing scent of a thousand flowers. Stupid plants—giving forth the same odors at a funeral as at a wedding. Crowding, smothering.

Mrs. Ryder weeping into a lace handkerchief. Mr. Ryder patting Mrs. Stern's arm reassuringly.

"You may kiss your bride."

Everybody looking sympathetic and benevolent.

Gail Garsten on the high seas. Naomi looking reproachful—

If Dr. Stern were your doctor, you were either very prosperous or very poor. His fees were ten dollars or nothing. Five hundred for an obstetrical case or he did it gratis. His car was not seen at the doors of the middle-class apartments that lined the streets. Only uptown society could afford him—and the women who carried their babies long, tiring blocks through the heat to a milk station.

"Fine man, Doc Stern, and I'll fight anybody who says he's not. He gave my wife as fine care as anybody could get who was paying him."

The god of Washington Heights. Dr. Warren Stern, who fixed you with a cold eye, called you a coward if you couldn't bear pain, but rushed to you when you needed him and frowned if you said he was kind.

He lived in a brownstone house with his wife and his little two-year-old boy. There was a colored man to open the door, a girl to answer the telephone, and an expressionless nurse—besides the servants who were used in the family part of the house.

People said they wished the doctor were friendly and talkative, like his wife, whom they saw occasionally. But one couldn't have everything. He was competent, lenient but gruff when you needed a soothing word, and a woman had better not hope for an anesthetic with Dr. Stern.

"In the months preceding this night I cared for

you," he would say. "You are in perfect condition to stand the pain. Don't waste your breath; you'll need it."

Of course the patient would have known all along that he would not give an anesthetic without having known how much she'd want it.

"Don't be a coward now. You're not having a bad time at all. Stop complaining."

And this if you paid five hundred or nothing.

People wondered whether he was gruff with his wife and child. They could not see him in his family circle. They didn't know how he adored his baby and how he gave Naomi a tender, gentle consideration.

They never quarreled. They were polite.

"Would you be annoyed at my having guests Thursday evening, Warren?"

"Not at all, my dear. Quite convenient."

Often Dr. Warren Stern sat alone and thought and smiled grimly to himself.

This marriage of his—success, domestic amicability, money. All that he had dreamed would satisfy him on that night when he had proposed to Naomi. And here he had it all.

But, between the dream and the realization, a woman with hair of burnished brass had smiled and had passed by, leaving him to make the best of the dream that had materialized with such ironic accuracy.

But he had it all; and Naomi was an excellent wife, a perfect mother. It was not her fault that he hated her family; that her friends bored him.

Four years since he had seen her. Four years of Ryders in his office and Ryders in his recreations. Four years of work and no play, save the moments he spent with Junior.

Gail Garsten was back in America. He had seen her name often. She, too, was a success. But she didn't want him. She had a haphazard sense of decency. She had flown on his wedding-day. Four years! Was one crazy who could feel a fire burning that had not been fed for four years?

When she telephoned, he spoke to her. The telephone girl apologized for ringing his extension, but she explained that the lady had been terribly insistent.

Her voice came to him, bridging lightly and unconcernedly the years between. He closed his eyes and breathed the woodland freshness of her hair and saw her red sandals swinging carelessly upon her little feet.

"Dr. Stern?"

"Yes. Miss Garsten?"

Miss Garsten! While trumpets blared in his head and his heart pounded. Miss Garsten!

"Dr. Stern, I'm living downtown now on West End Avenue. If that isn't too much out of your way, I wish you'd come look at me. I'm ill."

She gave him the address. He would come down when his office hours were over.

She was ill. So was everybody else, it seemed. His reception-room refilled a dozen times.

At last he was free to go find her—Gail Garsten, the woman who had smiled and passed by.

It was an elaborate house in which she lived—a house with gold-braided attendants and much ceremony attached to reaching Miss Garsten's apartment.

A colored girl admitted him. It was not till she had led him across a brilliant waxed floor, past satin-lined walls, that he realized he had been expecting a tiny, dusty apartment with a broken mirror.

Gail was not in bed. She was lying on a chaise-longue, eyeing a book uninterestedly. She was thin and pallid, but her hair was still the golden riot he remembered.

She smiled up at him.

"Hello," she said. "How is everything?"

"Fine. How are you?"

"Sit down," she commanded.

She spoke to him for fifteen minutes about herself. Gail wasn't one to speak of Gail. Stark terror lurked in her eyes as she spoke. He asked a question now and again. She answered, narrowly watching his reactions.

When she had finished, he rose.

"Get into your clothes," he said. "We're going at

once to get an X-ray. They'll rush the plate. I'll be able to tell soon—"

But he could tell already. He wasn't facing the facts with himself. He knew. And she knew, too.

It struck him as quaint that this was the first time he had ever seen her dressed. She sat beside him in the car, staring ahead of her, fighting to keep the terror out of her eyes. She was not thinking that this was Warren beside her. This was Dr. Stern rushing her for an X-ray photograph.

Suddenly she turned and said abruptly:

"You'll tell me the honest truth, won't you?"

"Certainly."

And he told her what he had to tell her.

Late that night, after dinner with Naomi, after seeing twenty-five other patients, after kissing Junior into a giggling fit, he returned to the West End Avenue apartment with his news.

She took it standing up. Even the terror seemed to die out of her eyes. A dull, empty peace seemed to descend upon her. At least, she had not the suspense any more. This was final.

"You'll have to go away," he said. "Texas or Colorado. You can live for years out there. In New York you couldn't last six months."

He could have worded his speech less brutally, but he had told it that way to a Mrs. Harris two weeks

before, and it seemed unfair for him to murmur soothing phrases just because this was Gail.

"You mean I'm going to die in six months?"

"No. You may live your natural span out West."

She walked to the window and gazed down at the avenue. Warren watched her. Tall, long-limbed, young. Soon she would be quiet, cold. Would she go away from the theaters she loved and the people she knew?

He crossed to her and took her hand. "Will you go?" he asked.

She faced him, and he saw that big tears were running swiftly and quietly down her face.

"Warren," she cried, "I'm frightened—afraid of death! Afraid of being laid in a narrow box and put in the earth. I can't stand it. Why should I die?"

She was going to be hysterical. He took her in his arms.

"Honey, think of the sensible part of it. You can go on to be a little old lady if you'll just change your place of residence. You can write your plays and ship them here. You'll make new friends."

She pulled away and turned her eyes to him.

"Will you go with me?" she asked. "I have loads of money. I can write more successful plays. You won't have to build up a new practice. I have plenty. Oh, Warren, come with me! I can't face the future

alone. I'll awaken at nights with my flesh crawling with fear. I'll go mad. Warren, Warren!"

Her arms were around him. Her white hands plucked insanely at his hair, at his coat collar.

Well, why didn't he go? It was quite true that she could live indefinitely in another climate—quite true that he loved her. Funny, the things that came to his mind:

Mrs. Tomaselli, poverty-stricken, trusting, depending on him to deliver her child any day now. Junior, bravely astride his hobby horse. The Heights, familiar territory, loving friends.

Gail said "Come," and Dr. Warren Stern stood silent and white, rage seething within him. He couldn't go.

A conscientious person couldn't leave suddenly with a million things undone. What about Mrs. Tomaselli's baby and the old lady who had heart palpitation? Not sentimental attachments, God knows, but things that pulled and pointed the way.

A mind must go where the body goes. Could one live with a mind that kept asking questions?

He wanted to go. He loved her. But he couldn't follow her. People needed him here.

"I'll give you a sleeping powder," he said.

He put the little white packet on a desk and went out. In her eyes he saw again the dull, empty peace of released suspense.

The night sat glowering and black upon the city. He drove home, and spent hours looking out the window of his room.

He saw the blackness retreat before the gray of morning, and he saw the gray beaten by the reddish gold that was like a summer morning—or like a woman's hair.

He heard the servants moving about, and he changed his clothes. He had to go down to breakfast. Naomi would be concerned about his absence.

She met him in the breakfast-room. Her face wore the usual smile. She offered him some toast, commenting upon the weather as she did so.

He looked over the paper sketchily, merely to give her the assurance that all was right with the world.

In the fourth column he saw the news item:

GAIL GARSTEN COMMITS SUICIDE

Miss Gail Garsten, author of *When the Bough Breaks, Jim, Many Happy Returns,* and the now popular *Devil's Carnival,* as well as several novels, killed herself at three o'clock this morning by drinking a poison. She was known to be in ill health.

Naomi looked up at him. Her smile had disappeared. She was not looking reproachful, either. There was something new in her eyes—a softness, sympathy.

"Will you have another cup of coffee, dear?" she asked.

He answered mechanically. "I never drink a second cup," he said.

"I know; but I thought that *this* morning you'd need it."

He wanted to say, "Why *this* morning?" but he didn't dare. Naomi's eyes—soft, tender, wet with his misery. She *knew*. How long had she known?

The telephone on the table rang.

"Mrs. Tomaselli needs you at once."

"Pardon me, my dear," said Dr. Stern, and arose without finishing his breakfast.

"Can't you do something for me, Doctor? Oh, I can't stand it! Such pain. Mary Mother of God help me! Doctor, Doctor, can't you do something? Holy Virgin help me!"

Dr. Stern's lips set in a firm line.

"You're in perfect health," he said. "You're having a very easy time. If you were having any complications I would know it and give you an anesthetic. Be quiet."

The Italian woman writhed in silence for a minute; then she said:

"You don't know what pain I'm having."

Dr. Stern smiled at her. "I've seen a great deal of this," he said.

"But you don't know the pain that somebody else is having. You can't know. You may have a pain yourself this very minute, but I don't know. You can't understand somebody else's pain."

Dr. Stern looked at her young, fat face distorted with agony. No, she didn't know about his pain. He hadn't known the depths of Gail's. And Naomi, quiet, wide-eyed—how long had she known his secret?

Nobody knew what the other suffered. Separate entities, uninterested even in the midst of trouble. Pain. Gail—Naomi—himself.

He turned to the nurse and tersely ordered an anesthetic for Mrs. Tomaselli.

VI. MOLLY

Pick-up

On a November night in 1916, Harry Glynn stood beside his taxicab and looked One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street over. His stand was between Seventh and Eighth Avenues and as he waited for a fare he looked hopefully toward the Ritz Café, across the street to Pabst's, and every now and again he threw an inquiring glance diagonally toward the Celestial Chinese Restaurant. The theaters which lined the block were closed for the night. It was chilly and a sharp, cold rain was beginning to fall. Well, that would help business, Harry thought, as he turned up his coat collar.

He hummed a little song to himself. It was a new song but kind of sad.

"Poor Butterfly, 'neath the blossoms waiting,
Poor Butterfly, for she loved him so—"

That was a hell of a thing to write a song about. A butterfly! They'd be writing about caterpillars and weasels next.

"Cab, sir— Oh, for Jees' sake! I thought you were a sucker."

"No, just a struggling young cab driver like yourself without a cab. The Green and Yellow canned me just twenty-four hours ago."

"For what, Ben?"

"A little misunderstanding about four dollars and ninety cents."

"Gee, tough. Say, why don't you get a cab of your own? I just finished paying for this two weeks ago. It's all mine."

"Yes, and all that goes with it. Worries and so forth. You keep it, boy, I'm not worried about anything. I just left May."

"Who?"

"May. You know May Flynn."

"What? That dame you flirted with in Liggett's?"

"Yeh. She's a swell baby."

"You can keep her. Any of these pick-ups you're welcome to. Dumb? Say, one more thought and they'd be half-witted."

"Well, May is different. She—"

"Say, didn't I pick up a dame once that wanted to see the Levy-McClintock fight and when I told her that I couldn't take her, that I had to work that night, didn't she ask me if they didn't have a matinée? Dumb? Say, these pick-ups are fierce."

"Well, May is—"

"Say, I've had all the pick-ups I want. I've had thousands of them. Dumb? Jees, they're dumb. It stands to reason that a girl who'll let you pick her up is dumb. Does she know that you won't murder her? Does she know you'll treat her decent? And if she had any sense she'd have a fellow of her own, wouldn't she?"

"Well, you see, May is all right, Harry."

"Yeh, all right but dumb. These pick-ups is dumb, I tell you, Ben. I had one once that wanted to marry me and just to put her off I said I was married and she said if I loved her that wouldn't make any difference. She said if I'd only go down to City Hall with her and marry her, she'd feel that she could face her family again."

"I guess a lot of dames try to marry you, kid. You're a swell-looking guy."

"Maybe. Not a half hour ago, some frail with a snoot full of gin hollers, 'Look, there's Tom Meighan driving a taxi.' No kiddin', Ben, do you think I look like Tom Meighan?"

"Well, it's quite possible, Harry. See you some more."

Ben turned away. Harry watched him to the corner. Funny, how Ben left so suddenly. Was it because he told him what the dame said about his looking like Tom Meighan? Gee, funny that Ben should be jealous of another's guy's looks. A fellow

couldn't help it if he was handsome, could he? Poor Ben with his pick-ups. Gee, this was a slow night, and cold now. Cold as hell.

"Cab?"

A young man and a giggling girl piled into the taxi. They gave an address on the other side of the Willis Avenue Bridge.

"I wish you mugs would stay in the cab as long as you'll stand in the vestibule," Harry thought. "You'd run my clock up to a hundred and eleven dollars."

Sixty cents for the trip and a hard, thin dime besides. Well, when you get a dime for a tip you can always think to yourself that after all you won't always be a taxi driver. And dimes ain't as bad as nickels, and there's plenty of nickels.

Back to the stand again. Two girls with angry expressions climbed into Harry's cab and ordered him to One Hundred and Tenth Street.

Harry listened to them talk. One claimed that she'd never been so insulted in all her life. The other insisted that she had Jack McDuff's number the minute he asked her if her mother was living.

"It's a good thing that you two had your mad money," Harry thought.

The stand again. One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street had retired during his absence. Pabst's had

closed. So had the Ritz. The Celestial crowd was never very good. Tough luck missing the Pabst bunch. Oh, well, what the hell.

Should he go home? Not likely to be anything worth while now, and it was cold. Still, you couldn't tell. Maybe something good would come out of the Celestial. Harry fumbled in his pocket and found the nickel which the two insulted ladies had given him. Heads, he'd wait for the Celestial crowd to turn out. Tail's, he'd hit the hay.

Suddenly he became aware of a girl standing on the corner not fifteen feet away from him. A neat number. Tall. He liked tall girls. It was always his luck to pick little shrimps that he had to lean over to hear them speak. She was cold. No wonder. What the devil was that she had on? It looked like one of those short thin jackets that are worn in the late Summer. Swell-looking baby a little out of luck. Harry wondered who she belonged to. He guessed she wasn't a bum. Those tall ones with the square, straight shoulders were rarely that kind. You found the tramps among the "cute" type.

Another taxicab appeared from around the corner. The girl took an expectant step forward, but as the taxi went on its way without stopping, she returned to her original position and turned up the slight collar of her jacket.

A wind sailed with sudden bitterness down the street. Harry looked at the girl and found that she was looking at him.

"Guess I could take her," he thought. "Pretty nice, too. But these pick-ups. Dead from the ears up."

He turned away from the wind to light a cigarette, and when he turned around again she was beside him. A girl with a firm young chin, gleaming dark eyes, and a hat with faded, rain-spotted ribbon.

"You staying on this stand all night?" she asked.

"Maybe. Why?"

"Well, if you were I thought you'd be a big-hearted guy and let me crawl in your cab. I'd be warmer and get a little sleep, maybe. Every time you got a fare, you could shake me and I'd jump out and wait for you to come back again."

"What's the matter? Out of luck?"

"No. I'm paying off an election bet. You see, I thought that Hughes would be elected. No kidding, big fellow, do you think I'm asking this because I like to?"

"You seem like a good kid, but to tell you the truth, I'm just going home."

"Oh, all right. No hard feelings. Sorry I bothered you."

She turned from him then toward the dark corner where the cold wind circled in a free and merry dance.

"Wait a minute, kid." Harry raised a detaining finger. "Were you waiting for somebody?"

"No. I just come out to get a breath of air. Good night." She waved her hand at him.

"Say, wait, listen." He ran the few steps to where she stood. "I think I got your number. You ain't on the turf, and you ain't pulling a hard luck line for sympathy. You're all right. I want to ask you something. Do you want to come with me? I only got a room and the landlady'll think you're one of the usual kind, but she won't put you out. If you're cold and you ain't got no place to go, you won't mind roughing it. You can have the bed. I'll sleep in a chair."

"Gee, that's nice of you. What makes you so decent?"

"I like you. What's your name?"

"Molly. What's yours?"

"Harry Glynn. Come on. I'll buy you breakfast in the morning and maybe you can get a job."

"You're a swell guy."

He led her back to the taxi and she settled herself beside him.

"I like to do favors for people," Harry told her. "No use being mean to unfortunates. I guess that's why everybody likes me so, because I'm a regular fellow. I pride myself on being decent. It pays. Say,

you couldn't have struck a better guy than me. You'll see how lucky you were, kid."

The taxi rolled on through the chill Harlem night with its proud owner and the girl, Molly. She sat looking at her benefactor. There were in her eyes disappointment, amusement, and something akin to the look of a mother who knows her child needs a whipping but who feels herself emotionally unequal to the task.

And now America was at war. Molly woke Harry up to tell him so.

"War?" he asked, still struggling to come out of his dreams.

"Yes, a war, honey. I thought I'd tell you because it won't be mentioned in the comic strips nor on the sporting page. Wake up, America is at war."

"Aw, go to hell. What do I care?"

"You might have to care. Uncle Sam is calling you."

"Yeh? Well, I got another hour's sleep coming."

Molly laughed and went back to the living-room. She had thrown her bundles on the table. Now she brought them to the kitchenette. Chopped meat, a can of tomatoes, a box of noodles and four yards of pink voile. Curtains in that bedroom would make things more homelike. Especially pink curtains.

She began at once to shape the chopped meat into

little cakes. She had to be back at the theater by seven-thirty. Ushers got fired if they weren't in their uniforms by the time the theatre was open to the public.

"Come on, Harry. Get up."

"What's the matter? Another war?"

"No, the same one. Come on, get up. The meat cakes are frying."

"All right."

One nice thing about being an usher was that you didn't have to be there until one-thirty in the afternoon. Wouldn't it be terrible if you had to get up early and you couldn't wait for Harry to come home in the wee, small hours?

It was while waiting for him after midnight that she cleaned house. They only had the two rooms and kitchenette and bath, but it was pretty nice, Molly thought. Eighth Avenue, of course. The L did make a hell of a lot of noise and the neighbors weren't very clean, but it was cheap, and it was so close to One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street that other things could be overlooked.

Harry came into the living-room. They kissed.

"What's this about the war?"

"America's at war. I knew you'd be glad that we finally got into it. I was telling the girls just yesterday how anxious you were for us to get into it so you could enlist."

"What? Me?"

"Sure. Didn't I say to them, 'I'll bet my Harry's among the first ten that enlists in Harlem'?"

"Did you say that, baby?"

"I sure did. Don't I know my big, brave, good-looking boy?"

Molly's big, brave, good-looking boy had a moment of doubt.

"I don't know—" he said slowly.

Molly deftly turned the meat cakes. "I was saying," she went on, "only yesterday that if the war did break out no guy who didn't enlist could ever look himself in the face again. Why, I don't see how a gink could go on laying bricks or taking tickets or driving a car over here when other fellows were fighting for him, do you, Harry? Jees, what would people think of him? And if he did enlist everybody would think he was great. Think of how people would stare at him in his uniform and admire him. Of course, little fellows won't be no knockout in army clothes, but a big fellow like you will look grand. Well, I guess these meat cakes are ready. Are them noodles soft?"

Molly had set the table while talking. Two plates. Two cups and saucers. Salt and pepper, butter, sugar, and milk. Bread and two forks, two knives, and two spoons.

Harry sat down to eat. He didn't say much at dinner. In fact he said very little for the next two weeks. He was quiet and moody.

Then one night he said to Molly, "I'm going to enlist. Now don't cry and pull any of the stuff women pull at a time like this. My mind's made up. I'm going. It's a fellow's duty."

Molly put her arms around him and buried her face in his chest. She held him close and with one hand ruffled his wavy, black hair. They stood so for several seconds.

"Are you crying?" he asked after a time.

"No, dear."

"Why the hell ain't you? I might get killed."

"No, Harry, you won't get killed. Maybe some other poor lads will, but not you."

Harry grunted. He was not certain just what she meant.

Later when he was wearing his uniform and looking handsome and invulnerable, Molly did cry a little. He was so sure of himself, so big and full of life, and yet one little bullet—

"You take the cab, kid, and sell it. The insurance is in your name, and if I do come back"—his eyes wandered to the place where other women wore wedding rings—"we'll do that little thing."

"We'll do it now, Harry, if you want to."

"Suppose I should come back crippled?"

She smiled faintly. "Suppose you do?" she asked. "Where do you think I'll be?"

He shook his head.

"I'll be waiting, Harry. If you come back whole, crippled, or not at all, I'll always be waiting. You see, Big Fellow, I've gotten to kinda like you." She turned from him suddenly to hide what could be easily taken for tears.

But after all, Harry Glynn went to war and left no wife behind him. He left Molly. She put a little service flag in her window and walked along Eighth Avenue with her head high and proud, but in her heart there was a terrible dull fear. She bought a book that dealt with recipes for cakes and candies. Women all over America baked and cooked and sewed for their men at the front, and in a little kitchenette in Harlem there was Molly who had battled bitterly with life, leaning anxiously over a saucepan full of fudge.

She did not sell the cab. She found a man past the age limit who would drive it for her. Twenty-five dollars a week and tips. He was honest. Perhaps he had always been honest, and perhaps, again, he remembered what Molly had said when she engaged him.

"If you pocket my profits I can't prove it in court, but I can wipe Seventh Avenue clean with you."

She could and he knew it. He was honest.

Molly went on ushering, writing letters to Harry, and looking in jewelry shops. The wide wedding rings were old-fashioned, but she kind of liked them.

And so for Molly the war passed. Armistice night came, and Harlem shouted and sang. Molly pushed through the crowd and ran to her little kitchenette apartment. She wanted to be there alone and think. It was over, and soon he would be back.

He came. He was well and whole. He had enjoyed every minute of the war, but Molly saw at once that Harry shuddered to think of what might have happened to the Allies had he not gone.

"Well, Big Fellow, it's good to see you."

"Grand to see you, baby. What'll we do tonight?"

"Sit and talk."

"Say, I've just yearned for a bowl of chop suey. Can you get off from the theater?"

"Sure."

But later, after he had looked in on the gang, dazzled Harlem with his stories of the war, and had had his chop suey, Molly had him all to herself. She showed him their bank book. She had saved over a thousand dollars.

"Well, I'll be damned," Harry said. "How did you do it?"

She tossed her head and laughed. Harry hated her to toss her head like that. When she did it her dark,

curly hair fluttered away from her cheek. There was a little scar there. He hated that scar. It looked like the kind you could do with a knife.

"I thought," she said, "that it might give you a little start. You always said you didn't want to drive a taxi forever."

"Say, kid, I got wonderful plans. I'll be a success in this world yet. You can't keep a fellow down. Not the kind of a fellow who can go to a war and keep his business running perfectly while he's away. What the hell are you smiling about?"

"Nothing, sweetheart, go on."

Harry sold the cab, and for twelve hundred and fifty dollars he purchased an automobile agency. The agency was in Fordham. Harry knew Fordham only by running there occasionally with a fare. Molly had never laid eyes on that section of New York before.

They took an apartment on Davidson Avenue, put the name Glynn in the bell, and settled down to making a success of the agency. The car that Harry was selling was a poor man's car. It was a neat little thing and had a good motor. It was splendid value, the neighborhood was right for that type of car, but there wasn't much advertising done on it. Harry and Molly just got by. Molly wanted to work.

"What can you do outside of ushering? Nothing.

It don't look well for you to be an usher now. It was all right when I drove a cab, but it's different now."

And every day Harry, looking trim and attractive, walked up and down behind his plate-glass window while Molly did her housework and the marketing. She got to know some of the women in the house, and she learned to window-shop along Fordham Road and the Concourse. Mrs. Heck, little and blonde, sometimes got pains in her back from pushing the baby carriage, and Molly would take it from her and wheel the baby as they walked.

It was from Mrs. Heck that Molly learned all about how you put argyrol in the baby's nostrils if he has a cold and how you have to give him orange juice in the morning.

"Oh, you'll have one before long," predicted Mrs. Heck. "This is the place where everybody has them."

"I don't think I will," said Molly. She had stopped looking in jewelry shops.

And Mrs. Heck had gone from Davidson Avenue and her baby had learned to count to fifty, and still Molly was walking the Concourse, wondering if they had really been in Fordham three years.

She was paying her own way now. Harry had bought her a cab on the installment plan, and she had paid him back. She felt better about things now. The kid who drove her cab was the son of a neighbor. He was honest enough to let Molly make some profit on

her investment. Somehow she hadn't the old feeling that she could wipe up the street with anybody who cheated her. You lose that with the passing of time.

One day while Molly was washing some of Harry's shirts there was a business meeting held in Detroit. She didn't know about the meeting nor did she know anybody who attended it and would have been surprised to know that because of the meeting she would wash very few of Harry's shirts in the future.

First came the advertising. A million-dollar campaign telling the world that a car was on the market that couldn't be beaten in beauty, speed, or value. Then came the new model. Harry had it in his show window and the crowd packed the sidewalk. A beautiful job, the people said, and they bought.

"Oh," Harry told Molly, "I knew it was only a matter of time."

They moved to a larger apartment because Harry wanted to. He said that he felt cramped. He got Molly to take on a maid.

"We might as well live like we were somebody," he said.

"Who are we?" asked Molly.

"Mr. and Mrs. Harry Glynn."

"Starting when?" asked Molly.

Harry laughed. "Any day now, sweetheart," he said.

Molly acquired another cab. It was for sale cheap, and she bought it. Harry kidded her about her chicken-feed business, but she went on with it.

His show room was a crowded place now and his service station swarmed with mechanics. All over Fordham busy little cars were running, and their spare tires wore neat little covers with the name Glynn on them.

Harry gained weight and wore an expensive wrist watch. Every day he dropped in to see his favorite barber and was duly shaved and made happy. He joined the Elks and knew every Fordham merchant (who was of any consequence) by his first name. He turned down an offer of twenty-five thousand dollars for his business and bought himself a three-carat diamond in his tie. He gave Molly a sport coupé for her birthday and raised hell with her for letting her hair grow.

"Why don't you leave it short?"

"I'm getting too old to feel comfortable with it bobbed."

"Jees, I see dames sixty with it bobbed."

"I know, but I got a funny feeling about what's going to look funny. I feel old, Harry."

"Why should you? Ain't we having a good time?"

"Yes, I suppose we are."

"We're going over to Dr. Stern's tonight to play cards."

"Who's he?"

"He's got a twelve-room apartment on the Concourse. He's class. He took a liking to me right away. He said I could bring you, too."

"A real democrat, eh?"

"Come on, sweetie, get into your best clothes."

Dr. Stern was very affable. He was fifty and proud of his home, his family, and his profession. Doubly proud that he had been smart enough to reach middle age without being barred from his home, his family, or his profession. Molly knew his type, but didn't know why she did. Surely she had known no prosperous uptown doctors before. Mrs. Stern was stout and extremely talkative. She held post-mortems after every deal and announced in detail what she intended to do with every card that was dealt her.

Muriel Stern was twenty-two and had a pair of sparkling gray eyes that were startlingly expressive. She had a very red, very pretty mouth, and faintly golden skin. Her hair was very black and straight. She sat next to Harry in the game and they whispered a lot together.

On the way home Harry said, "That Stern girl is sure a flirt. She likes to snatch husbands."

Molly laughed hollowly. "That's where I got the laugh on her," she said. "You're not my husband."

"Say, Molly, I meant to speak to you about that. Do you mind very much that we didn't get married?

We're happy and we're true to each other. What more than that is marriage?"

"There could have been children," Molly reminded him.

"Well, we're young yet. We'll get married some day soon. Soon as the first of the year is over."

"Don't think you're bulling me, Harry. I haven't expected to marry you after the third day you were home from France. I'm living with you because I love you, because I think I make life comfortable for you, and not because I'm waiting for you to marry me. I'm thirty now, and I'm not going to start having kids, but I wanted to seven years ago."

"I'm sorry, Molly. Gee, I guess I've done something terrible. Well, don't be sore at me, baby. Wait till you see what I bring you tomorrow."

It snowed the following day, and Molly drove her car over to the service station to get chains put on it.

When she walked in she saw at once that Muriel Stern was sitting there talking to Harry. She looked away from them. They would speak to her if they chose.

A mechanic came over to her and shouted her request the length of the service station.

"Mrs. Glynn wants chains on her car." Great rushing of mechanics and hauling of the little car. Mrs. Glynn wants chains on her car. Mrs. Glynn. Molly stood still and watched them. In a mirror she saw

herself. Tall, still slim, wrapped in moleskin. Her face was hard, she thought, very hard. Her hat had a little veil that fell over her eyes, and right beneath the veil, where her hair was pulled back, there was that little scar acting as thought it were alive, reddening, whitening, reddening—

Muriel and Harry walked over to her.

"I'm going to buy a sport coupé just like yours," Muriel said. "I dropped in to see about it and Harry asked me to lunch, but I won't go unless you go, too."

"Sorry, I've got to be downtown by twelve-thirty," Molly explained. "One of my cabs hit a fellow and I've got to see about it."

And after all, Muriel went to lunch with Harry alone. They went to a matinée afterward and had dinner together. Muriel sat across from Harry and surveyed him with interest. He looked back at her. She wore a tight little crimson turban over her gleaming black hair and the smoke from her cigarette spiraled gracefully across her vivid face.

"I think you're wonderful, Harry Glynn," she said. "You were a taxi driver and you worked and saved to better yourself and now you're worth fifty thousand dollars."

"Fifty thousand! Say, baby, you're putting it mildly."

"Really?" Muriel's eyebrows rose a little. "Your wife must be very proud of you. I suppose she is

bright enough to develop your tastes so that they will gibe with your business genius. She probably tells you the right books to read and that sort of thing."

"Well, not exactly. You see, Molly don't know very much. She's never gotten past the taxicab game. She's all right, but she—"

"Doesn't understand you?" Muriel suggested.

"That's it. Gee, you word things just right, Muriel. She doesn't understand me."

It was after nine o'clock when they left the restaurant. There was so much to talk about. They took a little ride up as far as Peekskill and back.

"I really have to go home now," Muriel said.

"Must you?"

"Yes, truly. I don't want to, though. I've enjoyed being with you."

She turned and looked at him. Their eyes met, and suddenly neither of them could think of a thing to say. He leaned over and kissed her. A sweet and very expensive perfume swirled about her. Her lips were soft and warm. Abruptly she jumped from the car.

"Good night, Harry," she said. Her faintly golden face turned from him, but he went home remembering her eyes and the expression which they had carried away with them. He remembered, too, that the Sterns were a pretty good bunch for a fellow to be mixing with. Gee, Muriel's sister had had her picture

in the uptown society section of the paper when she had been married.

Miss Dietrich told Molly to walk right in Mr. Glynn's office.

"He's got Dr. Stern in there, but it's only a social call. Go ahead in."

Molly went in. First there was a little box of a room with partitions that did not reach the ceiling. Beyond that was the place where Harry was talking to Dr. Stern.

"Gee, I never thought it was anything wrong," she heard Harry say.

Molly paused in the little box of a room and listened. Why not? Anything that Harry had done wrong was her business, wasn't it?

"It's not because it's you, Glynn, don't misunderstand me. I like you a lot. It's just that you're married. Girls aren't supposed to run around from noon till midnight with married men. You're good-looking and you're attractive and Muriel is crazy about you, I suppose. Anyhow she has refused to stop seeing you. So I've come to you about it. If you care about her at all, you'll stop endangering her reputation and tempting her to take an irrevocable step. If you were single I'd welcome you as a son-in-law, but you're married, and if you don't stop calling Muriel up and

sending her flowers and gifts I'm going to take the matter up with your wife."

There was a moment's pause in the room behind the partitions. Then Harry spoke.

"Molly is not—" he began.

Molly threw open the door. "Hello there," she cried. "How are you both?"

Of course what Harry had been on the point of saying was, "Molly is not the kind who'd be sore at me." Certainly that was what he was going to say. It had been silly of her to burst in upon them. Of course that was what he'd been on the verge of saying, or else something like that. But somehow she was glad she had not heard him finish the sentence.

Molly wrote a letter that night. It was the first letter she had written since Harry came back from France.

"Dear Dr. Stern:

"Harry Glynn is not maried to that Molly who calls her self Mrs. Glynn. They hav never bin maried and he is a free and singel man and he is too desent to tel you so. I no them frum years ago and no that they ain't maried. You tel him that you looked there marage up and that it wasn't in City Hall and see what he sez.

"One Who Noes."

After she had mailed the letter Molly went to sit in her living-room. It was beautifully furnished, but it didn't have the coziness, she thought, of the living-room on Eighth Avenue where there had been a kitchenette and voile curtains. She looked at the big reproducing piano that sat darkly in the corner with its metal cloth cover. On the cover sat a picture of Harry in uniform. The picture had been taken in Harlem. This was Fordham. Women went marketing here and had babies and bought cheap pianos on the installment plan. Who would guess it?

The maid came in and asked for the night off. She was slight and pleasantly tan. Pretty little thing, Molly thought.

"I want to do some shopping," she explained. "Down on a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. Want me to lay out your night things?"

Molly laughed a little. Then a little more. She was crying by the time she reached her bedroom. She hated herself for crying. There was a song the theme of which she had always liked.

"If you can't hold the man you go
Don't cry when he's gone."

Still, if he was a man whom you'd known for nine years and if you'd yearned for him and prayed for his safety during the war and worked for him and

watched for him and loved him— How the hell could you keep from crying?

Molly fell asleep with the rhythm of the song beating in her temples.

"If you can't hold the man you got
Don't cry when he's gone."

"How many cabs have you got now, Molly?"

"Four."

"Suppose I make it six?"

"Suppose you do?"

"Would it make you any happier?"

"No, I'd only have to pay you for them."

"Well, I mean as a gift."

"I don't want any gifts like that, Harry. My business is a business, not a hobby."

"Well, listen, Molly, I got something to tell you. You must have an enemy somewhere. Somebody wrote and told Doc Stern that we weren't married."

"No kiddin'?"

"Yes, and he wants me to marry Muriel. It seems I've blackened her name or something. I thought if I gave you two more cabs you'd be able to get along all right. You see, you don't care about having kids, and I think I ought to have a couple. Doc Stern says it's awful selfish not to have them if you got money enough to give them a good break. If there's anything you want let me know, and say, Molly, let's

be friends always. I like you and I've never believed a word I've heard against you."

"Maybe some of it was true."

"I know, but I always went ahead treating you white and I leave you now without an ill thought in my head. I think that's one of the reasons I made a success of my life, I never part bad friends with anybody."

"When are you leaving?"

"Tonight. I'll go to the Concourse Plaza for a while. You take your time getting out of here, Molly. Just let me know when you are out, because I'm going to sell this stuff."

"I hope you'll be happy with Muriel, Harry."

"Oh, I'll be. She's a wow, Molly. You'd like her if you knew her better. You know, Molly, she buys her clothes down on Fifth Avenue."

"Why?"

"Why! Jees, Molly, ain't they better clothes than you'll see around Fordham? Ain't she the best-looking thing around?"

"She's young, Harry, that helps her appearance. When I was her age I looked better than I look now and I wore dresses that cost an awful lot less than the ones I bought lately."

"Well, I guess Muriel has some natural style. I'm glad you ain't taking on, Molly; that would hurt

me. We ain't going to be married for three months or so because I want people to think you and I are getting a divorce. It wouldn't be so good for business if the truth got out. Keep it quiet, will you?"

"Yes, Harry."

"'At a girl."

Molly moved to Creston Avenue. She took a two-room apartment with kitchenette. It was on the top floor, and from her windows she could see the tall apartment buildings on the Grand Concourse. One of the buildings was named the Thomas Jefferson, and its name stood in blazing electric letters upon its roof. Somewhere beneath those letters lived Harry with Muriel. Molly never saw him, for Fordham has a caste line, too, and those that live in kitchenette apartments on Creston Avenue do not visit with the select few who have duplexes in the Thomas Jefferson.

Molly and her cabs pulled through all right. Her rent was always paid, and her little table held all the food that one person could desire. She went to the movies and played poker with the people across the hall, and in the afternoons she strolled with ladies who pushed baby carriages along Fordham Road.

She was not too poor to pick up a dress now and again at the Lucette Shop and always she had a half

dollar for the Salvation Army girls who rang her bell. She had heard that the Salvation Army had been good to the boys in France.

Muriel's picture had been in the paper when she had married, and sometimes Molly took it from her bureau drawer and looked at it. Muriel had been very beautiful in white satin with her veil draped gracefully behind her and the ribbons from her bouquet falling in a snowy-white shower from her long fingers. Molly would look at herself in the mirror when she had finished with Muriel's picture. She would laugh a little and turn away. She had learned that if you laugh just at the right moment it will keep you from crying.

A year passed. Then another one. And one night when Molly was sitting in her living-room playing solitaire the bell rang and Harry walked in. He threw his hat on a chair and sat down heavily upon the couch.

"Hello, baby," he said.

"Hello, Harry. How's tricks?"

"Rotten. Say, what the hell did you make it so easy for me to leave you for?"

"What's the matter?"

He just shook his head.

"What is it, Harry?"

"Nothing that you could understand. What do you know about marrying a woman and her father

and mother, too? They think they own me. Jees, I can't draw a breath around there without giving reasons for it. I just walked out on the whole damn bunch of them."

"And you came here?"

"Sure. Why not? Cripes, you never nagged me or expected me to play bridge, did you?"

"Oh, Harry, that's such a little thing."

"Yeh, a little thing. How would you like to live for two years with little things cropping up every hour? I can't play bridge and my grammar is terrible and Dorothy Wittenberg has a bigger diamond than Muriel's and when are we going to Europe and why haven't I some respect for the medical profession and— Hell, I'm sick of it."

"And?" Molly stood straight and tall, looking at him coolly.

He came over and clung to her like a frightened child. "I can't go back, Molly. I gave her old man a poke in the nose and told them all to go to hell. I—I want to stay here with you. She'll divorce me, but I don't care. I knew you'd always wait for me because I treated you right, didn't I, kid?"

Molly didn't answer him. She just held him close and looked over his shoulder and out the window where the lights of the Thomas Jefferson were blazing with a bright and orange venom. She was won-

dering if there was breakfast enough for two in her little ice-box—

Thirteen years ago a taxicab driver on One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street said, "Dumb? Say, these pick-ups is fierce. Jees, they're dumb."

There was a bird who knew his onions.

VII. CARLO

She Has a Little Girl

They laughed at you if you were particular about the way your hair was combed. Mother laughed in that high-pitched theatric key that you hated, and Daisy Gruen's little nose twinkled like a rabbit's. Mother and Daisy exchanged glances and laughed.

"She's trying to look older, Anne," Daisy would warn your mother.

And, because you had not yet fully acquired your lacquer of civilization, you would look full at Daisy and say, "That's where we differ materially."

Daisy would glower at you, and Mother would begin one of her time-worn sermons about having respect for her friends. You kept quiet, because nothing had ever been gained by arguing with Mother. She listened to you, nodded, and then, when she had you alone in her bedroom, fetched you a slap across your mouth that you remembered till the next time Daisy's sly remarks made you see red.

Everybody knew that Daisy was wild about Bob Lawrence, but nobody was obviously amused at her

devotion. The whole trouble, of course, was that you were only fifteen.

You knew that Bob Lawrence liked a dozen girls as well as he liked Daisy. Eligible girls, too. Daisy was just his once-in-a-while.

You took some consolation out of the fact that you were the only fifteen-year-old to whom he told secrets. He told you once that he was flat broke and that he was getting by on his nerve. Another time he told you that your father was a hell of a fine fellow and that you mustn't believe the things you might hear your mother's friends say about him. He added that your mother was a wonderful woman, too.

You nodded, but said nothing. You knew your mother, but you knew little of your father, save that he called you by your full name, got red when you stared at him, and gave you a hundred dollars for "hair ribbons" on each of his yearly visits.

You knew that Bob had once met him in Chicago and that they had become pleasantly plastered together before Bob discovered that he was Mrs. Bleeker's husband. When Bob had returned from his trip he had looked at your mother very thoughtfully, and had grown angry at her high-pitched laughter.

"Heaven's sake, Anne," he had shouted, "what's so funny?"

"Oh, your meeting Jim and getting lit with him is simply killing," she had howled.

"Your egotism is lovely," Bob had responded. "You can't picture Bleeker and me as two fellows exchanging stories and experiences and getting to be friends. You can only see the friend and husband of Anne Bleeker talking about Anne. You women make me sick."

You had sat very still, listening to them. Ought a guest in your mother's house talk to her like that? Most of the guests didn't. Only Bob. You didn't blame your mother for letting him get away with it. He was so good-looking, so nice. They said you had a case of puppy love and they laughed at you.

You weren't very happy. Mother said you were at the happiest time of your life and that you should make the most of it. How did she know you were at the happiest time of your life? She bought new clothes, surrounded herself with yes-women, spent her monthly check, and remembered to ask you once in a while how you were doing in arithmetic.

You rather liked Mother, though. She was all right when she was left alone, but Daisy Gruen, who had come to spend a week-end two years previous, never left her alone. It was Daisy who pointed out your faults to Mother, and it was Daisy who said, "Anne, Carlotta's a big girl now. She can stay in the house with the servant while we go for that trip on Dave Summer's yacht."

That wasn't nice of Daisy to take Mother where

you couldn't watch her. You felt that you had more sense than Mother had. You could keep her out of mischief.

Mother was thirty-two. You had read somewhere of people who mentally never passed their twelfth year. You suspected that Mother was one of them. She was so pretty, too. So girlish-looking.

Daisy had her way. She could have gone alone, but you knew that Daisy had no money and always needed Mother and your father's check to see her to and from a visit.

You didn't like money. It was something about money that kept Mother from divorcing your father and starting all over again with a new husband. You almost wished she would do that. Then people would think your father was dead instead of living in Chicago away from your mother.

Mother had charge accounts in every store in the neighborhood. The grocer, the delicatessen man, and even the candy-shop respected your orders. You thought you'd give a party while Mother was gone. It would be something to do.

You gave out your invitations verbally while standing in front of the high school. You knew plenty of girls, but not very many boys. You'd never made friends with the boys. Silly, half-baked, long-legged creatures. Maybe they'd be like Bob Lawrence when they were older, but now they were impossible.

You solved the problem by getting the girls to bring their own boy friends.

The crowd came. They played the victrola and the piano, and they got quite as gay on sarsaparilla as Mother's crowd got on cocktails. You were a little bored. You hated Steven Brown, who wanted to dance with you. He was only sixteen.

You sat on the stairs and watched the children. Why weren't you one of them? You thought it must be because your father and mother were separated.

At half-past nine Bob Lawrence rang the doorbell. You hadn't expected him. It seemed that Mother had asked him to drop in to see that everything was going all right. You were a little embarrassed at being caught in the middle of a kids' party.

You looked at the other girls and saw them unimpressed by Bob's handsome face and his movie-hero physique.

You wished desperately that you were unimpressed. But you weren't. Oh, you weren't.

"I have the car outside," he said. "I didn't know this was your big night, Carlo. Here old Bob comes along, thinking he's going to soothe your boredom with a little ride, and he busts right into a party."

"Wait a minute," you said. You went to the kitchen and lied to the colored girl about a message from your mother. You got your hat and left the party flat. You were going riding with Bob. You saw

him laughing at you as you went out without a word to the crowd. It didn't occur to you that he knew that you had a case of puppy love.

Thus Carlo Bleeker at fifteen.

She was under weight and freckled. There was a thick mop of golden-red hair and blue eyes that were soft and had the velvety look that really belongs to brown eyes. She was a grave girl.

There was a honeysuckle vine beneath her window, and often she stood on hot, starry nights breathing in the scent of honeysuckle and staring at the stars. She thought of her future. She could never marry Bob Lawrence. Long before Mother considered her almost a woman he would be married to some one else. To Daisy Gruen, perhaps.

He was twenty-six. If something kept him from marrying for another three or four years, perhaps—Carlo would shake off the dream. Absurd from beginning to end. This was puppy love. Everybody passed through it. Hadn't Kitty Sloane at the age of fourteen written a mad love-note to the leading man of the stock company? Yes, but since then Kitty had had four other heroes. Carlo had never had any except Bob Lawrence.

She watched him as he smoked, and thought that no one had ever held a cigarette so gracefully. He sat in his special wicker chair on the veranda and talked books, politics, religion, and Freud. He wore sport

shirts open at the neck. He had straight taffy-colored hair that lay sleek and smooth. He wore a gold wrist watch.

Carlo devoured him with her eyes. Mother examined her finger-nails or watched her cigarette burn down in its coral holder.

It was to Mother that Bob spoke. When he used the word "potential" or "inveterate" or "archaic," Carlo could see by the expression on her mother's face that she now felt that she was on her mettle. Mother didn't understand any word that had more than two syllables, except "alimony."

After Bob had gone home Mother and Daisy laughed at what they called his soap-box talks. Carlo never laughed at him. She was too deeply impressed.

He lived two blocks away. He was an only child. His parents had a huge house. They didn't approve of Bob's frequent calls at the Bleekers'. Carlo knew. Nobody had ever told her, but she knew it. She knew it best when Mother was dressed for company and stood before Bob, laughing up into his handsome face and leaning slightly against him as she pinned a flower on his coat.

He always looked puzzled when she did that. Daisy Gruen looked angry.

Carlo didn't blame Daisy for looking angry. Daisy was a thin, rather scrawny girl, and Mother glittered

with beauty and had a long, straight body as terrifyingly exquisite as a flame.

Nobody ever said anything to Carlo about going to bed. She would be there when the company came. She would watch them go systematically about the business of getting drunk. And always she watched Bob Lawrence, who always drank too much and never showed it.

Sometimes Mother would make him angry. She would tell him that he talked too much or that she wished he would go home. Then he would retire from the party. That meant that he would come over and sit next to Carlo.

They would talk quietly together as though there was no clinking of glasses in their ears, no gibbering of men and women who came to Mrs. Bleeker's house to get drunk, to borrow money, or to meet their sweethearts.

Once Carlo cried. There were examinations the next day and no place in the hateful, noisy house where she could go to study. The examinations were important. She sat in the midst of the drinking, singing, flirting mob and cried. Bob came over and sat beside her. Mother had told him that he was a spoilsport, and he fled to the one place in the world where his average never dropped below a hundred per cent.

He held Carlo's hand and talked to her. He was

a good talker. He could sell bonds, borrow money, or assure a doubting feminine heart that he was different from the others.

"Honey, you're seeing the thing all out of proportion," he said. "You're a clever girl; clever in the things that count. You know more about human nature than all the people in this room put together. You might fail tomorrow, but in the years to come it won't matter. Suppose you don't know geometry or English Lit.? Carlo, the gods are framing big things for you, and they're not the kind of gods who are put off by a mere flunking of a high-school test."

She carried with her into her sleep the memory of the pressure of his fingers upon her hand. It didn't matter that five minutes later he left her while she was talking to him and ran to relieve Mother of a tray of sandwiches. It didn't matter that she flunked in the tests. Bob Lawrence had held her hand.

It was over her failure in passing the examinations that Carlo had a fight with her mother. She knew that girls didn't usually have fights with their mothers. It was all part of her loose, haphazard training that she and Mother could stand and exchange taunting, bitter words. As though they were two women in love with the same man, Carlo thought, instead of mother and child discussing the flunking of a high-school exam.

"You're a blockhead," Mother said.

"It runs in the family," said Carlo.

"I don't claim to know anything," Mother answered; "but you're always correcting my spelling and yelling about the books that Daisy reads."

"Well, I'd have passed the test if your friends weren't too drunk to keep quiet long enough for me to study a little."

"That's right. Blame it on my friends."

"I can blame more than that on your friends."

"What, for instance?"

"Never mind."

"Don't you say 'never mind' to me! Out with it. What can you blame on my friends?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"I understand one thing, though. I understand that you're making an idiot out of yourself, mooning over Bob Lawrence. You're only a little girl. You have no right to sit across the room from him looking at him as though he was God Almighty."

"What ought I to do?" asked Carlo. "Pin a flower on his coat and look at him as though I were Delilah?"

Mother would argue as long as she could think of an answer. When she had no answer, she would remember suddenly that it was a shame the way this ungrateful child talked to her mother.

"You go up to your room, you fresh kid, and stay there till I say you can leave. Understand?"

Carlo went up to her room. She cried for a little while and then fell asleep.

Later the door-bell rang and woke her. She could hear the colored girl explaining that Mrs. Bleeker and Miss Gruen had gone to a matinée. The door shut.

Presently Carlo heard the piano. Then a voice:

"Sweet summer breeze, whispering trees,
Stars shining brightly above;
Roses in bloom, wafted perfume—"

Bob! Bob was downstairs! She opened the door and looked over the banister at him. She knew that she would always remember him as she saw him then. Something inside of Carlo longed to weep for the beauty of the music. Always she and Bob would be as they were at that moment. He, utterly ignorant of her eyes upon him, and she, forgetful of rules and possible punishment, lost in admiration of him. Always? How absurd. This was puppy love.

She called him, and he looked up at her in surprise.

"Hello," he said. "I didn't know you were home. Just practicing my little piece."

Carlo motioned him to hush. He came up the stairs.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing. Getting punished. Have to stay in my room."

"What's all this about?"

She went into her room and he followed her. No other man had ever been in there. The room had a little white bureau, a desk, two chairs, a cot covered with cretonne. Carlo sat down shyly on one of the chairs. Bob threw himself on the cot. He lit a cigarette.

"Bored?" asked Carlo.

"Yes, bored with myself. I've got a lot of news and nobody to tell it to."

"Thanks," said Carlo.

Bob laughed. "There's always you, isn't there, Carlo? Well, here goes, sister: little Bobbie's going to be married."

Carlo said, "Huh, is that news?" And she got up and looked out the window.

"Sure that's news. What did you expect?"

"Who's the girl?"

"Claire Smythe. You don't know her."

"No," said Carlo. "She must be awfully nice, though."

Bob smiled at her. "You say sweet things," he said. "Some day somebody's just going to love you to death."

"Oh, you would of course want to talk about love today, wouldn't you?"

Bob laughed delightedly. "Sure would. Never mind, Carlo; five or six years from now you'll be interested in the marriages that take place among your friends. How old are you now?"

"Going on sixteen," said Carlo. "Bob, get out of my room, will you? You're dropping ashes on my bed."

"I'll bet you've dropped ashes on it yourself."

"I?"

"Certainly. I bet you've tried to smoke."

"Mother would kill me."

Bob shoved his cigarettes over. "Pravity begins at home," he said blithely. "I must say, Carlo, that if I expected weeping, wailing, and gnashing of feminine teeth over my approaching nuptials, you've knocked my expectations for a row of bridesmaids."

Carlo laughed a little. "Mother's a Greek, Bob; I've got her Spartanism."

"You didn't get Spartanism from your mother, Carlo. You got it from a red-faced Chicago lawyer who never says die. But, no kidding, Carlo, think anybody will feel bad about me getting married?"

Carlo didn't answer him. She was coughing over her first cigarette.

Late that night, when Daisy Gruen and Mother had finished talking over Bob's engagement, they called Carlo into Mother's room to break the news. "Just to see what she says," Daisy had suggested.

Carlo came in her nightgown, looking very childish and no fair game for teasing. Her eyes were a little swollen.

"Bob's going to be married," said Mother.

Carlo yawned into her hand. "For heaven's sake," she said, "is that what you two have been gabbing about for an hour? Of course he's going to be married. Most men get married."

"But soon," Daisy prodded her; "next month. Thought you'd like to hear about it."

"You were wrong, as usual," said Carlo.

"I think you're going to have pink-eye," said Mother. "Go back to bed."

Carlo turned to obey. As she left the room she heard Mother say, "I'm going to his wedding, and I swear to God, Daisy, when he introduces me to the girl, I'm going to say, 'Well, Bob, I don't know how you got such a nice wife after the scandal you were in down in Washington.' I'm going to start something for him to explain to his blushing bride."

But she didn't. She died of pneumonia three days before Bob's wedding and she was buried just as Bob was saying to Claire Smythe Lawrence, "Honey, I tried to get a suite of rooms, but we'll have to manage with this."

Carlo hadn't known that Mother was going to die. Daisy Gruen had known. The doctor had taken her for his patient's sister and had told her that there

was no hope. Daisy had left at once, taking with her all Mother's best clothes and $160.

On his last visit the doctor had found a very frail, red-haired little girl trying to get Chicago on the telephone.

"No sense in you being up at this hour, child," he had said kindly. "Go to bed."

The child had looked at him quietly and he had felt an uncanny chill pass up his spine.

"My mother is dead," she told him. "I am trying to notify my father."

Father had come from Chicago.

He asked where Mother's friends were. Carlo said nothing.

He ranted at the outrage of a child having to pass through such a situation alone and friendless. Still Carlo said nothing.

He asked where Bob Lawrence was, and Carlo laughed and cried, and her father promised her a bicycle if she'd stop.

He looked at Mother, and it was Carlo who said, "She looks beautiful, doesn't she? Peaceful and certain at last."

"My God!" said Jim Bleeker and stared at Carlo uncomfortably.

He took Carlo back to Chicago with him. He had a huge, airy apartment furnished luxuriously.

"Do you live alone, Father?"

"Yes, Carlo, all alone. Let's see, now: we want a real good boarding-school for you."

"Oh, can't I stay with you?"

"No, Carlo."

Chicago was pleasant.

"Father, I could perhaps be useful to you—do your shopping and things like that. I could learn about shirts and socks and underclothes and pajamas."

After she found a bureau drawer full of pink lingerie and a rhinestone headdress which had been forgotten in somebody's sudden departure, Carlo stopped protesting.

She went away to boarding-school. Her father bought her five hundred dollars' worth of clothes, but he didn't ask her to write.

The boarding-school was back in the East. To graduate from it meant that you were ready for the junior year in any college. Carlo was one of the younger girls. No coffee, no gadding about without a chaperon.

One of the teachers, a white-haired woman with a sickeningly gushy manner, called her "little Bleeker," and advised her not to get in with the older girls. Some of them had witnessed domestic dramas and things of that sort and they talked about them, the teacher said. It might rub some of the bloom off little Bleeker to hear such stories.

She lived through the term, hating the school,

hating the world. May came, and the function of the year—the dance to which the girls were permitted to invite any male they wished.

The school buzzed with excitement and gossip.

Carlo didn't know any man to ask. Mr. Lawring, who owned the school, sent the invitations. He would have taken it as further evidence of Carlo's sullenness had she said that she knew no one. Carlo told him to send her invitation to Mr. Robert Lawrence.

Bob's regrets came back to Mr. Lawring with promptness. There was a letter for Carlo.

"Dear Carlo:

"Wondered what had become of you. Do pay us a visit. How did you know where to find us? Can I come to your party? Don't be silly. I'm expecting to become a father any minute. Will let you know when the child arrives. Don't forget. Ask your father if you can pay us a visit.

"Yours,

"Bob."

A girl whom Carlo hardly knew furnished her with a guest for the evening. His name was Preston Holmes. He looked gentle and sad-eyed, as though he were still grieving over the loss of his curls. He told Carlo that it was a simply wonderful dance.

"Everybody is so charming," he said.

"Yes, painfully so," said Carlo. And he looked

more gentle and sad-eyed than ever. He was seventeen.

"You two looked so sweet together," said the white-haired teacher. "You know, little Bleeker, I think it's so nice to keep up these schoolgirl friendships. That's Preston Holmes. His father is worth a great deal of money."

"Is that so?" said Carlo.

School closed. She went back to Chicago. Her father was married to the owner of the pink lingerie. Her name was Ola and she looked surprisingly like Mother. She and Carlo clashed at first meeting.

"I will never go back to school again," Carlo told her father. "Never, never!"

Her father turned her over to Ola, who reported her as quite impossible. Carlo spoke of her invitation to visit the Lawrences. She wanted desperately to see Bob again. There wasn't anybody in the world who mattered except Bob.

Her father wouldn't let her go.

"I don't know why I object," he said frankly. "I just do. You'll have to take my refusal without a reason."

Carlo remained in Chicago. She wrote to Bob Lawrence six times without an answer. At last his wife wrote one of those dear, pretty letters to a sweet girl graduate. She told all about the precious baby

that God had left in her care, and said how often Bob mentioned dear little Carlo. Carlo didn't answer the letter.

When she was eighteen she was straight and slim, and her figure angered Ola. She wore tight-fitting dresses, and her hair, that was a bright golden red, was parted in the middle and banged in a thick burnished bang that hung to her eyebrows.

There was a goldenness in her skin, and her wide red mouth and sky-blue eyes made Jim Bleeker worry for her soul. He had never thought of souls before this sober, soft-eyed girl with the precocity of the devil's own had dropped in on his consciousness. He couldn't love her. She frightened him.

She stood in the doorway and looked from him to Ola, and he felt that she was seeing his past, present, and future far more truly than he ever had or could.

He had tried to buy the disconcerting fire from her eyes. He spent as much on her clothes as he did on Ola's. Hadn't he sent her to a good school and hadn't she hated it? Hadn't he introduced her to everybody he knew and hadn't she stayed concealed in herself? She was not a normal young girl.

Once he came home late at night. There was a light burning in the living-room. His daughter sat at the table writing a letter. There was an ashtray beside her and a burning cigarette rested upon it. Jim

Bleeker had not objected to her cultivating the habit. He only wished she'd cultivate a few more habits dear to the heart of the new American girl.

"Hello, Carlo."

"Hello, Father."

She continued to write. He put his hat on a chair and stood staring down at her. He was thinking of the night she had been born.

"Why do you stare at me so curiously?" she asked.

"I was just thinking, Carlo." He took a chair beside her. "Sometimes I don't think you're happy," he said. "Carlo, I never asked before, but tell me a little something about your life with your mother, won't you?"

"Why?"

"Well, because I want to know. I've met a lot of girls, Carlo, but never one like you. You're not interested in men or clothes or dancing or anything. What can I do to make you happy?"

"Nothing," said Carlo.

Jim Bleeker swallowed hard. He knew that she meant there was nothing in his power that he could do to awaken a sparkle of interest within her.

"Listen, Carlo. When you came here you were only fifteen. That's pretty young, but the courts have taught me that some women are never young. Tell me, daughter, did you ever care about any boy or young man—too much?"

Carlo laughed. "Don't be piling up evidence against me," she said.

Her father caught her hand as she dipped her pen into the ink-well. "I want to know, Carlo."

"Oh, there was the usual case of puppy love," she said. "I'm not brooding over that. Leave me alone."

Jim Bleeker got up. "Sorry I opened the subject, Carlo. Good night."

As he passed around the back of her chair, he looked at the letter she was writing. A line of words rushed to meet his eyes: "You'd never know me, Bob. I'm eighteen—"

Jim Bleeker brought Matthew Turner home. Matthew was a young lawyer, quiet, clever, good-looking. Ola was visiting some friends in Oak Park. Jim proceeded to get tipsy.

"You two kids make a fine-looking couple," he said, looking from Carlo to Matthew. "Why don't you two get married? I have to take my wife to Europe. You can have the apartment. Carlo hates my wife. And *vice versa*. I'll give the kid a hundred and fifty dollars a week allowance."

Matthew Turner flushed and looked away from Carlo.

He married her a month later. The Bleekers left for Europe.

The Turners took over the apartment.

The first night they were alone in it, they quarreled violently. It had to do with Carlo treating Matthew as though he were a venomous reptile. She hadn't at all. Matthew felt guilty about having married Carlo without loving her. He was supersensitive about her reactions to his advances.

"Your father gave me an idea what was wrong with you," Matthew shouted. "There is another man."

"No," said Carlo quietly. "There is no other man. There is only an obsession."

"Then why did you marry me?" Matthew shouted.

"To please my father. Why did you marry me?"

"Because you're the most beautiful thing I've ever seen."

"And Jim Bleeker's daughter."

"You're hard as nails."

They patched up the quarrel. Matthew laid his head on Carlo's shoulder and called himself names. He was afraid of Jim Bleeker.

Carlo was afraid of no one. If she could live peacefully with Matthew, she would give married life a trial. If there were to be quarrels, she would leave him. It had been a silly existence, hers. Divided into two parts—Bob and no Bob. Perhaps Bob had meant to be impressive as he had sat smoking gracefully on

the veranda of the first Mrs. Bleeker's home, but surely not *this* impressive.

Had there not been a sudden complete break with him she might have recovered by now. Her ardor might have died a natural death. But she had been taken from sight of him, and her infatuation had been sealed in its pristine glory within her heart. Now there was nothing to do but rehearse her memories of him. He lived forever handsome and debonair. A criterion to which every other man compared unfavorably.

She looked at Matthew Turner. He was her husband. How silly. Well, what else could she have done? Ola had not wanted her to go to Europe, and her father had not enjoyed having her about.

Matthew put his hand under Carlo's chin and raised her lips to his. She kissed him. Here was a marriage for you! Well, what good was love? No love had any more sense than puppy love. Carlo put her arms around Matthew's neck.

"Love me?" he asked.

"Um."

"Much?"

"Um."

"How much?"

Here was honeymoon talk. He was asking her how much she loved him. Carlo couldn't think of an answer.

"Much as everything in the world?" prompted Matthew.

"Oh, for God's sake, yes. Kiss me and keep quiet," said Carlo.

After a decent length of time had elapsed Carlo had a baby. It was a little girl.

Jim Bleeker and his wife curtailed their trip. Jim wanted to see his grandchild. He had a yearning to see his daughter taking a normal interest in something. He wanted her to show him the baby's toes. He wanted to hear her say that her confinement had been something terrible.

He found Carlo sitting at the table in the living-room writing a letter. She motioned with her pen toward the windows and said that the baby was out with her nurse. She spoke little of Matthew or the child. She expressed a languid interest in London and Paris.

Jim Bleeker saw his granddaughter. She was a healthy, happy-looking infant. He had brought her a rubber doll from Paris. She laughed when he made it squeak. Jim laughed, too.

Carlo arose. "I'll be back, Father," she said. "I'm not very well. Noise gives me a headache."

Jim Bleeker heard the door of his daughter's bedroom close. He handed the child to her nurse and went home.

It was by the sheerest coincidence that Jim Bleeker picked that night to die of a paralytic stroke.

Carlo found that she had been willed several thousand dollars and some property, including the house in which she had lived with her mother. She thought that some time soon she would make Matthew let her go spend a month there. It never became necessary for her to coax Matthew. After Jim Bleeker's death, Matthew put in his appearance with ever-increasing irregularity.

One day he came home to an apartment from which his wife and baby had departed. They had, however, left their address and a request that he mail them a check every week. He complied with the request. After all, they were his wife and daughter. He found consolation.

Carlo with her baby and nursemaid arrived in the fog of a bleak November morning. Arrived. Carlo felt that at last she had really arrived. Passers-by stared at her curiously. New passers-by. She opened the door. It groaned and protested, but it opened. The child and the disapproving nurse walked into the chilly gray hall.

Carlo lingered for a moment on the veranda. She looked at the door-sill. How many times before had she crossed it? How many times had she sat on that very railing and leaned against that very post? But

that had been young Carlo. That Carlo was no more. There was only the Carlo who was nearly twenty-one, who had a child, who had left her husband.

She closed her eyes and tried to hear the tinkle of glasses, the screech of Mother's high-pitched laughter. Gone.

She walked into the house. Her child was clinging to the nurse, fearful of the dark house and the dusty, fearsome stairs that stretched their length into unexplored blackness. The furniture was shrouded in great bulky coverings. Carlo ran about the foyer, ripping off the shrouds. She ran up the stairs. The hall above was quiet. Plaster had fallen and wallpaper had peeled. The door of her old room was open.

Daisy Gruen's room was still in disorder. The bureau drawers were open as she had left them. The closet gaped. Carlo recognized a hat that had belonged to her mother.

She walked into the room where Mother had died. When she came out again, she was smoking a cigarette through Mother's coral holder. Poor thing. Nobody had used it in six years.

By late afternoon the house was transformed. A squad of women with pails, mops, and brushes had brought light and cleanliness into the house. The electricity was turned on. There was a fire in the furnace. Baby Anne fell down the stairs. A piano-

tuner appeared. The trunks arrived. A cook was hired.

Carlo was home. Mistress of the house where it had been too noisy for her to study. Owner of the sofa upon which she had sat and heard a persuasive voice tell her that the gods were framing big things for her. What things?

Carlo laughed. The gods had never known of her existence. There had been no room for her anywhere in the world. Now she was here. It was her house. A passable house, and just two blocks away—

So the neighbors see her nearly every day. In the summer she is usually on her veranda, and they know that it is cocktails which she shakes for herself and the somewhat unattractive girl who lives with her. In the winter they know she has not gone away, for there is the noise of her piano and the shouts and laughter of her friends.

She wears frocks that call attention to her figure. Her hair is a sheen. The neighbors do not like her, but they watch her as she moves down the street. They wonder that Mrs. Lawrence allows her husband to sit so long on that veranda in the summer, hour after hour, smoking and sipping out of a tall glass.

"And she has a little girl," the neighbors say. "Isn't it a shame for the child?"

VIII. ALICE

John Jones and Wife

They were married in 1905. Lawrence Wall was a large blond-haired boy so shy and backward that people wondered how he'd had the courage to propose to Gertrude Austin. Gertrude was dark and had full, heavy red lips. She was very high-strung, her mother warned Lawrence, very high-strung. They spent their honeymoon at the Luray Caverns.

When they came home they settled down in a house on North Street. They lived very quietly. They passed their evenings reading. Lawrence read James Fenimore Cooper, Gertrude sat under a lovely red gas-lamp and sobbed over Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth's *Ishmael.*

Later Lawrence had electricity installed and Gertrude lay on the sofa devouring *Three Weeks.*

When they gave up the funny little old house and moved to New York, Gertrude got acquainted with a woman who made her read *The Fall and Rise of Susan Lenox.*

After that Gertrude thought no more of Mrs.

Southworth. She said that Mrs. Southworth was absurd. Later she laughed at *Susan Lenox.* She read *Jennie Gerhardt.*

In 1924 she read *Psychoanalysis and Love.* Nineteen hundred and twenty-five brought an interest in the evolution theory. The next year Lawrence stopped looking at the titles on her books. He was still reading J. Fenimore Cooper.

Since *Ishmael* many things had happened. Lawrence Junior had been born. Cynthia had been born. Marie Louise had been born. Gertrude had bobbed her hair. Lawrence Senior had made his mark and his pile. He had bought a thirty-room house in Forest Hills. He had grown stout and rather gray. He was forty-five. He had come to dislike Gertrude.

He hated the people she brought to the house. He couldn't escape them. He had nowhere to go. He never had been a mixer. He had no intimate friends of his own. He only could sit with Gertrude's friends till he grew sleepy.

Oh, he supposed they were all right, but there was something Lawrence didn't like about them. He hoped he was a broad-minded man, but he didn't like to see Mrs. Holt leaning against Jack Davies while Jack's wife stayed all too long in the pantry mixing drinks with Fred Drayton. He didn't like it. It wasn't decent. Perhaps he only thought this because he was forty-five. The others were in their twenties and

thirties. Gertrude seemed one of them. She was slim and shimmering and smoked with a grand show of ease.

Sometimes young Lawrence was at the parties. He was twenty. A sleek twenty with dinner clothes, a yellow roadster and a book of telephone numbers. His father had seen him on the veranda with Francie King. Francie was married and she was letting young Lawrence date her up for luncheon.

Cynthia, with pale gold hair and cherry lips, had given her mother's friends a cold shoulder. She was not yet eighteen but she saw these people through her father's eyes. She was young and beautiful. It was her right to flirt, to dance, to love madly one hour and laugh the next. She made them see that she thought these pastimes ridiculous in older people.

Marie Louise was only fifteen. She never came to the parties.

Lawrence Wall loved his children devotedly. What of Lawrence doing so badly at college? What of Cynthia, who came home at dawn and drew her gold tissue wrap about her lithe form and shrieked "What of it?" What of Marie Louise, who in another year or so would be collecting frat pins?

Lawrence Wall was not a happy man.

Gertrude could not manage her children because they thought her rather pitiful and futile. They

argued with her, they laughed at her. Lawrence could do nothing with them. He never had lost his shyness. Young Lawrence and Cynthia made impossible barriers against heart-to-heart talks. They made him feel foolish. Their ideas were a hundred years ahead of his. A dozen times a month he retreated ignominiously before their young brazenness and decided to trust in God. He wished he could trust in Gertrude, too. But he couldn't. Nor could his children. She was frail. Her friends and her beliefs varied with the seasons.

Often Lawrence Wall stared at her. She was the woman he had chosen for his wife. With her he had spent almost a quarter of a century. He was forty-five. He had used up most of his life on Gertrude—a woman with whom he had nothing in common. They were strangers. He was a stranger in his own house.

Gertrude's friends ignored him or talked down at him. When he spoke they were very kind and encouraging, always offering him the proper word or phrase for what he was trying to say. It amused them when he gave his opinion on cubist art. It amused Lawrence when they came to borrow money.

Frequently he wondered why he had made money. So that Gertrude might annex this mob of half-baked freethinkers? So that young Lawrence might be the

delight of bootleggers and gold-diggers? So that Cynthia never might know a man who actually worked for a living?

Strange how worried and unhappy a person can be even though he drives to business in a huge car with a liveried chauffeur at the wheel.

It was in September that Ben Tiever came on his annual pilgrimage to New York. He was from the town where Lawrence and Gertrude had been reared. On former visits he had spent his time with them, but lately Gertrude had taken to calling him a Babbitt and had shuddered at the thought of entertaining him. For Ben's sake, Lawrence did not force him upon Gertrude. He had lied like a gentleman. One year he had pretended that Gertrude was in Europe. The next time he spoke of Gertrude's serious illness. Of course, neither of these reasons explained why the thirty-room house in Forest Hills was closed to a friend of forty years' standing.

Perhaps Ben Tiever wasn't as stupid as Gertrude supposed, for on his next visit he installed himself in a hotel before calling Lawrence.

They dined together. It made Lawrence very happy to be with Ben. As always, they talked over the people they had known, the fish they had caught, the laughs they had had. When Ben spoke of Gertrude, she seemed a well-beloved figure in a blue polka-dot dress with a bustle. Ben made you think

that Lawrence Junior was a tow-haired baby who liked to hear about Peter Bunny Rabbit.

It was soothing to be with Ben. You forgot for a while that all the things he spoke of were gone. You looked younger, you laughed, you felt like a kid, you recalled the time you had borrowed half a dollar from Ben to take Gertrude out for an evening's entertainment. You laughed again. You laughed till the tears stood in your eyes. Then you stooped to pick up a pencil which you hadn't dropped. You worried a little about those tears. Maybe Ben wouldn't know you got them from laughing.

It was through Ben Tiever that Lawrence met Alice Maywood. Silly that Ben had to come all the way from Ohio to cause the introduction of two people who had been in New York for years.

Ben had the address of a congenial couple he had met at Yellowstone Park some months before. Upon closer investigation they proved not one whit less congenial, so nothing would please Ben but that his friend Lawrence should meet them too.

The Bordens had an apartment in the East Nineties off the park. It was small and well furnished, with the customary piano-lamp and incense-burner. The Bordens were not a breath-taking couple. They were north of thirty-five, mildly attractive, childless, and they called each other "Honey." Their technique

was to call everybody by his or her first name at once and try to get people to stay overnight.

They satisfied Lawrence. His soul was stifled for people who didn't claim to be analytical or atheistic or radical. Twenty minutes after his introduction to the Bordens, Alice Maywood rang the bell. She was a friend of Mrs. Borden's and she was a widow. This much Mrs. Borden shouted over her shoulder as she ran to the door. Lawrence was to learn more.

She came into the room and was exuberantly kissed by Mr. Borden. Mrs. Borden laughed so happily at this demonstration that you just knew she had had a hard time ridding herself of the prejudice against such behavior.

"Alice, this is Ben and Lawrence," twittered Mrs. Borden. "They have other names but it doesn't matter."

Alice Maywood flashed a smile at the men. Lawrence's first impression of her was brilliantly white teeth behind a conservatively rouged mouth. Later he saw black bobbed hair that waved with natural ease and eyes as blue as corn-flowers. She was quietly dressed and her figure was the old-fashioned sort. You could have told by the silhouette that Alice Maywood was not a boy. She was twenty-nine or thirty. She smiled without effort, but she did not have the importance-of-being-jolly air about her that Mrs. Borden wore.

By the time Lawrence remembered that it was not good manners to stare, the ball of conversation had revolved many times.

Mrs. Borden was remarking on an item in the newspapers.

"I see," she said, "that the Almighty App has been deported. Serves him right, trying to bring one of those disgusting cults into prominence."

Lawrence shuddered. Even here? Hadn't he heard enough of the Almighty App? Hadn't Gertrude and the Holts and the Draytons run to those midnight masses for a month and talked about them for a year?

"Who is the Almighty App?" asked Ben.

"I don't know his right name," Mrs. Borden returned, "but he's the high priest of a love cult or something like that. He talked a lot of money out of a lot of fools who, when bored with Mr. App, told the police about his do-as-you-will stuff. Serves him right. The idea of him starting a religion like that!"

The laughter of Alice Maywood punctuated Mrs. Borden's tirade. It was nice laughter.

"Oh, Hazel, Hazel," she laughed, "you are funny."

"Why?" Mrs. Borden asked indignantly.

"Well, because, dear, your Mr. App might be right. How do we know which is the right religion?"

"*I* know," Mrs. Borden returned. "And please don't call that man *my* Mr. App."

"Oh, look here, Hazel, there are ever so many religions in the world. We choose one and think the others are wrong. Which one do you suppose God has chosen?"

Without hesitation Mrs. Borden named the one which she firmly believed God had chosen and Alice Maywood laughed again.

"I'll tell you a secret, Hazel," she said. "God hasn't taken a religion yet. He's waiting till one comes along that He likes. That's what's delaying the Day of Judgment."

After that Lawrence never took his eyes off Alice Maywood. What a fantastic idea! He tried to imagine how the fancy would have been put over had Gertrude conceived it or any of the others. Certainly not so simply, so casually. Here was a woman who was so accustomed to getting new ideas that she didn't make a hullabaloo over them.

Lawrence escorted Mrs. Maywood to her door that night. In view of the Bordens' insistence that they had "plenty of room" Ben couldn't regard the solitary feeling of a hotel room with anything resembling tolerance. He decided to bask longer in the rosy glow of the Bordens' congeniality.

And Lawrence stood on the door-step of a brownstone furnished-room house with Alice Maywood. He had not stood so with any woman since the early

part of 1905. He had not been rather gray then nor stout. He had been shy and awkward.

He dropped his hat but managed to get out the words, "Could I see you tomorrow night?"

Alice Maywood smiled. "You dropped your hat," she said. "Yes, I'd be pleased to see you tomorrow night."

They had dinner together that next night and went to a musical show. It was almost like being with Ben. She was a peach, this Mrs. Maywood. Something so brisk and wholesome about her. You could feel young with her, too, and happy. No tall talk here. Just a plain woman with a head full of sense.

You couldn't tell Ben that Cynthia came home at dawn and that Lawrence Junior's yellow roadster parked in some strange places. You told it to Mrs. Maywood because you felt that if these thoughts stayed closed within your mind much longer they would fester. You told it casually, lightly, as though you were talking of Phil Calbert's boy and girl, but she saw at once that you were worried sick, she seemed to know of the hours you lay awake listening for Cynthia's voice on the terrace.

What a woman! You couldn't picture her leaning against Jack Davies and then raising the devil if he put a natural interpretation on her actions. She was not the woman to play at love. She would give all or nothing and be a true, strong friend in either case.

And it came to pass that at forty-five Lawrence Wall, who people said had everything to live for, finally got something to live for.

He wasn't missed at home. Gertrude didn't appear to notice when he began to skip dinners. She said nothing when he stayed away all one Thursday night. Even a week-end didn't arouse her curiosity. It was what he had expected. He knew Gertrude didn't love him. There was something in Lawrence Wall that would have held him back from even the promise of happiness and peace that he saw in Alice Maywood's eyes had he thought that Gertrude loved him.

But she didn't. All she wanted was her home, servants and money to pursue her fads. It took nothing from her when Alice Maywood rented a small apartment in Brooklyn and was presented with a quiet little car with which to do her shopping.

That little apartment in Brooklyn with its brightly draped windows and cheery air was home to Lawrence Wall. It was the honeymoon nest he had dreamed of in the cold gray dawn of the twentieth century. It was nice to sit at Alice's gate-leg table in the bright little dining-room and think of an evening, free of the Draytons, the Holts and their fetid brain processes.

This should have been his marriage. This woman, this tiny home. The sweet wholesomeness of it was manna to him. He no more could have borne a leer-

ing comment upon that apartment's significance than he could have stood calmly by and heard Cynthia called a vile name.

People would laugh if he told them that the atmosphere of his own home was a bit too bawdy for a Babbitt. Let them laugh. It was funny. Bitterly funny.

It was nice, too, to help around the house. It was years since Lawrence had hung a picture or chipped in a bit of advice on how to bake a fish. Oh, it was gorgeous to push Alice into the little living-room and stand at the sparkling white sink "doing" the dishes for her. It was Alice's fault that she hadn't a maid.

"No, Lawrence," she had said gravely, "I want housework to do. It's five years since I've had a home of my own. Oh, please let me dust my own chairs and cook dinner for you. Besides, I ought not to have given up the office. I'm expense enough as it is."

It was words like these that startled Lawrence Wall. Fancy anybody wanting to cook for him or considering herself an expense!

Occasionally they motored somewhere over Sunday. It was pleasant to ride for hours with Alice beside him laughing and talking.

The hotel clerks couldn't spoil his pleasure. In an easy manner he would take the pen and sign the register with a flourish. He had no talent for deceit. He wrote "Mr. J. Jones and wife." When with

Gertrude, he signed "Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Wall." That was the proper form, of course, but it was hollow and meaningless. Any woman could have been Mrs. Lawrence Wall. The words "and wife" were his tribute to Alice.

Most times he was too contented to question himself about the life he was living, but sometimes he tortured himself with accusations and inquiries. He didn't want to live this way. He wanted to be straight and true. He didn't like hiding Alice from the world or making a secret of the house where love lived.

Still, divorce—if indeed Gertrude would give him one—meant losing the slight contact he had with his kids. Besides, Gertrude also had used nearly a quarter of a century up on their marriage and she was satisfied as things were. It wasn't fair to her even to ask for release. No, there wasn't a way out. One must go on signing "Mr. J. Jones and wife."

It was hard when the fellows at Norman Beach asked him to join their fishing club. He and Alice spent a lot of time there during the summer. The week-end fishermen got to know Lawrence and like him. They were fellows like himself. Gertrude would have called them Babbitts or Rotarians. Lawrence liked them. They were good fellows, but he couldn't join their fishing club. They called Alice "Mrs. Jones." Hasbrook from Mt. Vernon wanted them to call when they got back to New York.

Lawrence fled from their affability. What would they say if they knew?

Confound the outside world—even Hasbrook and the other good fellows—for oozing into Paradise and wordlessly informing you of the errors you had not noticed hitherto!

It was Cynthia who next hallooed from the outside world. Lawrence was reading in his bedroom in Forest Hills on a rainy night. Alice had gone to spend an evening with some old friends. Gertrude and followers were at the theater. He was startled by Cynthia's voice coming from the foyer below.

"Now leave me alone, Ted. I don't like you and I never liked you and since you can't be decent, get out."

A male voice, irritatingly soft and silky, replied, "Now, Baby, I wouldn't hurt you. I'm crazy about you. All I want to know is when we're going to be married."

"Never," said Cynthia sharply.

There was a laugh from the soft and silky voice. "Your mother and father aren't in or I'd have you singing a different song."

Lawrence Wall appeared at the head of the stairs. "What's this?" he demanded.

Cynthia stood below him, her eyes fixed upon him resentfully. "What's it your business?" they seemed to say.

Her companion, a dark well-groomed chap a few years older than Cynthia's brother, came toward Lawrence.

"Mr. Wall, my name's Morrison," he said, "Theodore Morrison. I've been asking Cynthia to marry me."

Lawrence came down the stairs. He felt like rushing up them again as he saw Cynthia's lips curve contemptuously. What use was a father? she was thinking. Lawrence wondered, too, but decided to see the matter through.

"And she doesn't want to marry you?" Lawrence prompted. "In my day a young man took no for an answer."

Theodore Morrison coughed elaborately. "I fancy that in your day this sort of thing was less involved," he said. "You see, Cynthia has given me every reason to believe she loved me."

"What do you mean?" asked Lawrence.

Morrison did not reply for a moment; then he said, "I love her so much that I still want to marry her despite what has happened."

A silence fell upon the room. Lawrence Wall reached out and laid his hand upon the banister. Was he swaying? An impulse rushed suddenly upon him to clutch Theodore Morrison and choke him to death. He glanced sidewise at Cynthia. Her eyes were exploring the rug. Her hands pulled at each other

futilely. Lawrence saw that he could not choke Theodore Morrison to death.

"Cynthia," said Lawrence, "do you love this young man?" He knew he was doing it badly, awkwardly.

"I hate him!" cried Cynthia.

"And still you—"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, yes! Don't bother me. You couldn't understand. I hate him. I flirted with him. I picked him up right under Dick Larson's eyes and let him go the limit just because Dick and I had had a fight.

"Nobody could understand that. I don't care for anybody in the world but Dick Larson and I wouldn't marry this tailor's dummy if a million dollars went with him."

"Cynthia!" Lawrence went to her and put an arm about her. "This man cares for you," he said. "I'm sure he'd make you happy. You really ought to marry him, you know."

Cynthia ran up the stairs. At the top she paused and shouted down to the men below, "You can both go to hell! You can't make me pay a lifetime for one crazy night."

Lawrence let Theodore Morrison out.

"She's a foolish girl," said Mr. Morrison gently. "Many a man wouldn't pester her to marry him, but I'm broad-minded."

For the first time in years Gertrude and her hus-

band were in complete agreement. There was still enough of the old home town in Gertrude for her to forget modern ideas when her own daughter was involved.

"You'll marry him," Gertrude stormed, "and you're a lucky girl that he wants you. I never heard of such a thing. And as carefully as you've been raised, too."

Cynthia lifted sullen eyes to her mother's face. "I hate him," she said dully. "And I'll go so far that you'll never see me again if you keep this up."

Lawrence carried his heavy heart to Alice. She saw at once that something was wrong.

"What is it, my dearest?" she asked, perching herself on the arm of his chair.

He told her. It was easier to tell her than it had been to tell Gertrude. Her eyes were soft and sympathetic.

"Poor child," she said. "Of course, a girl that age could feel bitter and reckless enough after a lover's quarrel to do anything."

"But she must marry Morrison," he said.

"Why?"

"Because he's a nice enough chap and he wants her and it's the only sensible thing for her to do."

Alice Maywood laughed as she had laughed that other night at Mrs. Borden's comments on the Almighty App.

"Lawrence, Lawrence, why should the child ruin her life for such a little thing?"

"It's not a little thing."

"Well, then, look here, Lawrence Wall, if you marry Cynthia to that young blackguard I'm through with you. I'll know you're a hypocrite and a witch-burner. I don't like what you've told me about that man. I have a hunch he's all wrong. Has it ever occurred to you, Lawrence, that a young man doesn't pick up a girl, go the limit with her and then do his best to force a marriage? It doesn't happen. He's a money hunter. He doesn't give a hang for her. If he did, he would have died before telling her father how things stood."

"Well, what ought I to do, Alice?"

"You ought to look up this Larson boy with whom she quarreled. Get him up to the house. Be a mediator."

"But Gertrude wants her to marry Morrison."

"Be square with your daughter, Lawrence. You're not letting Gertrude's opinion of strait-laces for her own family interfere with your own plans. In a pinch, see Larson and find out how much he thinks of Cynthia. Tell him the whole story, if necessary. If he's the kind of fellow that I think your Cynthia would love, he isn't going to have a fit over a little matter when happiness is at stake."

Lawrence saw Dick Larson. Dick Larson tele-

phoned Cynthia. Cynthia agreed to see him for one tiny minute and the next morning Gertrude and Lawrence got a telegram from Atlantic City which read:

"Hallelujah we're married

"CYNTHIA and DICK."

"Well," said Gertrude relievedly, "I didn't care much whom she married."

"No, I know you didn't," said Lawrence dryly.

"Isn't it nice that Dick called her up yesterday?"

"Very," said Lawrence and he closed his eyes for one fleeting second and thanked God that even in the younger set He had made some regular fellows.

Cynthia was going to be happy. That much was settled. The kid had it in her to make happiness. Dick Larson was a fine young man. No reason why they shouldn't make a great go of it. But still the thing had happened. His daughter had gone wrong. It gave him a queer turn to say it even to himself. He thought of his mother. What would she say if she could know that her son had a mistress and that her grandchild at eighteen had a past? Was Cynthia's misstep a visitation on him for his own behavior?

He flicked the thought away. It defiled the little home in Brooklyn where one could talk about horses or Peter B. Kyne or apple orchards or any everyday

commonplace thing without somebody being amused. No, this couldn't be punishment. Still, there was Lawrence Junior, who had been "let out" of college.

Lawrence had managed to get his son a position with a man he knew. He hadn't wanted him around his own office, knowing full well that the boy would not respect orders there. He seemed to be doing fairly well in his position, but it pained Lawrence that the college had been unable to stand him.

"He'll come through top-hole," said Alice Maywood. "You'll see."

Lawrence worried over the boy. More than ever did Alice seem a haven of rest and calm to him. She was so steady, so sure. He always could go to her and find her smiling and blithe.

Once he had seen Lawrence Junior leaving a taxicab with a woman. It was Francie King, the same married woman who had let the boy date her up for luncheon. She wasn't more than twenty-two or so, but still she was married. She and young Lawrence ought to let each other alone.

Old Lawrence felt very old indeed when it came to having a talk with the boy. He found a sulky subject.

"Good Lord, Father, can't I have a woman friend without having the roof down on my ears? We're not back in 1880 now. A married woman can go to dinner

with an acquaintance without her husband turning her from his house. Jack King knows that Francie goes out with me."

"Yes, but I don't like it."

"Well, then don't spy on me."

"It was an accident, my boy—I didn't spy on you."

Things like this made Lawrence Wall stop and think. Again and again he asked himself if this was the way the Rotarian's God was showing His displeasure. Could it be that that God didn't understand how a man—even a man of forty-five—craved a companionable woman and a place to go where he was hailed as more than just the fellow who paid the bills? Often Lawrence Wall fell into disquieting reveries at his desk. Once his secretary asked him if he were ill.

When he was with Alice or on his way to see her, his thoughts were different. On these occasions he wondered what would have become of Cynthia had it not been for Alice's advice. He thought of the long, desolate nights when he had had no one in whom to confide his fears and worries. She was always so ready with a cheering word. Bless her heart.

Alice knew how Lawrence felt about her. She knew that the little apartment meant home to him. She had striven hard to make him happy. When one evening he did not put in his appearance at a dinner she had planned especially for him, it did not occur

to Alice to be angry. Alarm was the only thing she felt. This was not Lawrence's way. He never would disappoint her without a very good reason.

She paced the floor and counted the seconds. She longed to telephone his home but was afraid that any identity she might assume would not be clever enough to defy suspicion. An hour past the time set for dinner, Alice Maywood cried a little. Suppose something terrible had happened to Lawrence? She never would know until she saw it in the newspapers.

At nine o'clock she decided to be sensible. She charged her imagination to be quiet and made an effort to eat some cold and very dry food. Her attempt was brave but unsuccessful.

For an hour and a half she sat in the little dining-room staring blankly across the sparkling white-and-silver table.

Lawrence Wall found her so when he came weakly into her home at eleven o'clock.

"Oh, my dearest." Her arms were around him and she was laughing through her tears. "You're alive but something has happened." She held him off at arm's length and searched his drawn face eagerly. "What have they done to you, darling? What is it?"

"It's my son," he said. "He—he's gone."

"Gone?" Alice drew him down beside her on the sofa. "Can you tell me, dear?"

Lawrence smiled a grim, twisted smile. "That's

what I want to do," he said. "Since ten o'clock this morning it's the one thing that I've been longing for. If I didn't have you, Alice, I wouldn't have lived through this day. My son has left town with fifteen thousand dollars belonging to his employer and he took with him another man's wife."

"Oh, Lawrence, my poor darling!"

Like a tired child Lawrence allowed himself to be held silently in the strong, round arms that never failed him. They sat so for a time. He was content to drift unthinkingly for a blissful moment, to forget for a time the torture of the day.

At last Alice spoke. "If they get him, darling, will they arrest him?"

"No." Lawrence returned to his trouble with a sigh. "I gave Ralph Vetter my check for fifteen thousand and I have located the boy. He's in Toronto with the woman."

"When are you leaving for Toronto?"

Lawrence pulled himself away from Alice abruptly. What did she mean? Was she joking? He found no sign of a jest in the solemn corn-flower blue eyes that met his. She was deadly serious. She leaned toward him and met his glance. His breath came in short gasps.

"Lawrence, you're going to Toronto, aren't you? You're going to see your boy?"

"He's disgraced me."

"Disgraced you?" Her laughter rose thinly and broke with hysterical suddenness.

"What could I do in Toronto? He has fifteen thousand dollars. He'll get along."

"But aren't you going to let him know that you haven't cast him off?"

"But I have. I may feel differently about him at a later date but not now."

"Then it will be too late. Oh, darling, I see it clearly. He'll spend the money fast. He'll lose the woman. Then there'll be nothing left to him but a bitter feeling and another crooked deal. Lawrence, you're losing your son."

"What are you—a clairvoyant?"

"No. Just a woman who should have been a mother. Lawrence, if you wait you'll lose him forever."

"But he must be punished," he insisted.

"Why?"

"Because he's disgraced me," he insisted.

"Not so much as you've disgraced yourself by prating of forgiveness and punishment. Who are you to withhold your forgiveness? Who are you? Who are we? Mr. J. Jones and wife! Go see that boy, Lawrence, and don't mention forgiveness to him. Look him in the eye, tell him to come home and give him a job in your office. If you don't it's because you have jelly where other men have backbones. He'll

come and he'll make you proud of him. Lawrence Wall, isn't it worth fifteen thousand dollars to save your son from the dangerous feeling that he hasn't a soul in the world?"

Well, perhaps Alice was right. He didn't mean to be a brute but he did have a "back home" notion that Lawrence Junior should be punished. There was conflict that night in the little apartment. Till the gray of morning crept over Brooklyn's housetops Alice Maywood battled with Lawrence Wall for the soul of his son.

"Ignore him and you'll send him to degradation," she shouted.

"If I coddle him, he'll never see the error."

"He's seen it already. Do you think a boy of twenty-one is steel and flint? Don't you think that while he's spending his money and enjoying his sweetheart's kisses his conscience is bothering him? It is, Lawrence, it's troubling him because this is his first criminal escapade. After the second he will not be disturbed. Oh, Lawrence, go get him while he has a conscience!"

They faced each other, haggard and white, across the table where still lay what was to have been their dinner. A man and a woman battling. The inevitable, stern, unrelenting man and the forgiving, pleading woman settling a boy's fate between them. Mr. J. Jones and wife.

It was six o'clock in the morning when Lawrence left Alice. They kissed each other in parting and smiles crossed their tired faces.

"Good-by for a while, darling," he said.

"Good-by, dearest. Don't forget to take your other coat. It will be cold in Canada."

And because it is a funny world, this footstool of ours, it was Alice Maywood's steady, passionate battling that won for Lawrence Wall strange, unexpected words.

"You mean it, Dad? I really can come back? Oh, I've been miserable! Honest, I didn't know you were such a regular fellow."

Yes, that was fixed. You could see in the boy's eyes that he had had his fill of shady adventures. Francie King had had her fill, too, and was glad to go back to her dull and devoted spouse. Yes, that was fixed, but it had happened. The God of the Rotarians was not pleased with Lawrence Wall. He wondered if such things would have happened to him had he sat quietly at home and had he not taken the apartment in Brooklyn.

It was evident that it did not matter to the powers that be that he had not picked a chorus girl or a frivolous flapper. Alice was as enormous a sin as a silken lady would have been. It mattered not that the apartment in Brooklyn had a healthier atmosphere than the marital nest in Forest Hills.

It was superstitious, of course, but he could not shake off the thought that he had been punished through Cynthia and Lawrence Junior. Suppose that he continued with this double life? What would befall Marie Louise?

He said nothing to Alice about his disquieting thoughts; at least he didn't think he had said anything, but a fellow who is terribly perturbed is apt to give out more than he wishes to. She knew that something was wrong with him and since he did not confide in her she knew that it had to do with her.

He found her letter in the center of the table on which they had had so many funny little dinners.

"Darling Lawrence:

"I'm not making you happy any more. I'm sorry, dreadfully sorry but not morbidly so. There is no reason to fear that I've left in a mad state of mind. I'm thinking clearly and wisely. You've been wonderful to me. I'll remember you forever but we never will meet again. Mrs. Borden does not know where I have gone so don't scare up suspicions by inquiring. The car is in the garage. I've been happy and I thank you for everything.

"Love,

"Alice."

Lawrence Wall stuck the note in his pocket and then drew it out again. He kissed it and replaced it

carefully in his wallet. It was the end of his little commonplace romance.

It was on the following Sunday night that Lawrence Wall sat in the library of his charming house in Forest Hills. His family was grouped about him.

Cynthia and her husband took chances at trying to get the baby to sleep. Because of his nephew's wakefulness, Lawrence Junior had to whisper the questions he was asking his father about the new Western plant. Marie Louise was reading and Gertrude Wall sat lost in thought regarding her family with a puzzled expression in her eyes.

"Dad, didn't the baby say 'Mamma' a little while ago?" Cynthia suddenly demanded.

Lawrence nodded his head agreeably and Cynthia stuck her tongue out at her husband.

"Keep quiet, Cynth," said her brother, scowling at her. "Don't you think it might be nice if I found out something about this Western plant since I am going to assist in the running of it?"

Gertrude got up suddenly. "I'm going to bed," she said. "Coming up, Lawrence?"

"In a little while."

It was a long while before he went up, but he found Gertrude lying awake in the darkness.

"Listen," she said, "don't put on the light. I want to tell you something that I'm ashamed of. For ten

years, Lawrence Wall, I've thought you the biggest, dumbest ignoramus that ever made a fortune. I looked at our children tonight and nearly died of the humility that came over me when I realized what I thought of you. You made Cynthia and Lawrence strong, decent people after I'd made flabby little standardized dolls of them. You're a big man, Lawrence, and I've wasted years not knowing it."

Lawrence Wall smiled in the darkness. Gertrude talking to him in a tone that she had not used in years. His older kids settled in life, taking advice, giving loyalty. And where was the woman who had wrought the change? Where?

Suddenly Gertrude's voice rang again in his ears: "I'm not going to have a thing to do with Marie Louise's life. I'm going to leave her all to you."

All to him! Suddenly "Mr. J. Jones" felt very much alone and inadequate.

IX. COLLEEN

It's a Tough Life

He was in Jerry's garage when the call came. Damn it, why had he said where he was going? An interruption just when the dice were running his way. Eleven dollars ahead and Pinky, all smiles, telling him that he was wanted on the telephone. Pinky knew he was superstitious about interruptions.

"Hello." His voice was sharp and suggested that the party at the other end of the wire would state his business hurriedly if he knew what was good for him.

"Hello," said a woman's voice. "Mr. Russell?"

"Yeah."

"This is Mrs. Klein."

"Who?"

"Mrs. Klein. I got the apartment next door to you."

"Well, what about it?"

"Say, who you yelling at? I'm doing you a favor. I called to tell you your wife's got a bad pain."

"My wife's got a bad pain? Well?"

"Well, the doctor's there and he says it'll be all over in an hour. Maybe you'd like me to call and tell you whether it's a boy or a girl, you loafer, you!"

"Who are you calling a loafer, you damn meddler? It's a false alarm. Nothing'll happen for about two months yet."

"Oh, you're so smart, you Mr. Russell."

"And tell my wife to let me alone for a minute."

Dan hung up the receiver and strolled back to the boys.

"Make you sick," he mumbled. "If she complains of a toothache the whole doggone neighborhood's excited."

"What's the matter? Wife sick?" Jerry Sloane looked up from the dice with a kind, solicitous glance.

"Aw, I don't know. Maybe she's not feeling just right. But, hell, they think the kid's gonna be born right away and it can't happen before October."

Jerry Sloane smiled. "You got a contract to that effect?" he asked.

"No, but I can count."

Jerry's smile broadened to a good-natured laugh. "Gee, you're young, Dan," he said. "We got four kids and two of them were two months before their time."

"No kidding?" said Dan, astonished.

"So was my sister's kid," spoke up Pinky. "Gosh, I'll never forget it. I had her to a ball game when

it started. I had her to a hospital and the kid was there before the game was over."

Dan thoughtfully lighted a cigarette.

Phil Harris, picking up the dice, rattled them impatiently. "You oughta go home," he said. "But if you're not the sort that goes home when your wife is having a baby, then for Pete's sake let the game go on."

"You think I oughta go, Jerry? Think it's really possible that—"

"Of course it's possible. Even if she only thinks it's her time, you oughta be there. Gee, Dan, don't nothing make you feel like going home?" Jerry's blue eyes were not accusing—merely curious.

Dan fled before that honest curiosity in Jerry's glance, the contempt in Phil's, and the uneasiness in Pinky's. He didn't want to go home. Colleen had a doctor, a nurse, and her mother. What help would he be? Besides, he was eleven dollars ahead.

But home he went, with a sulky frown on his good-looking face. Why the devil did women have babies the first year they were married? Here he was only twenty-three years old and a father—or would be shortly. Colleen was only twenty, but she was more settled. She wouldn't mind having to stay home nights. But he'd probably have to stay, too. Twenty-three years old and cooped up already! Dan Russell shook his head and his tawny mass of wavy hair.

At home, all was confusion. The nurse, starched and crinkling, hurried past him without a word. He heard the rumble of Dr. Porter's voice behind a closed door. Once he heard Colleen moan. An hour passed. Dan rose from his chair and walked to the window. An hour sitting still, doing nothing, and he had been eleven dollars ahead!

Colleen's mother rushed into the room. She was a small, frail woman with black bobbed hair.

"It's a boy," she said, wiping her eyes with a little important flutter.

"A boy?" said Dan. "How is Colleen?"

"Oh, she came through it beautifully."

"That's fine," said Dan.

He hoped he was saying the right things. He was a bit afraid of Colleen's mother. She paid the rent and furnished a twenty-dollar bill each Monday morning. He called her Mrs. Mayo and never swore in her presence.

"Would you like to see the baby?"

"Sure."

Dan followed her down the hall to Colleen's room. He wished Jerry were there to give him a few pointers on how to act with the kid. Colleen wouldn't know whether or not his technique was wrong; but there was Mrs. Mayo with her sharp, darting eyes and her twenty dollars every Monday morning.

Would they stick the kid right in his arms? Did you try to make it laugh, or did you look solemn and sort of impressed with the greatness of nature? Of course he could drop on his knees at Colleen's side and gaze at her adoringly, as he had seen it done in the movies; but that would be a little hard to put over convincingly. He didn't feel like dropping to his knees; he felt like running back to Jerry's garage.

Mrs. Mayo opened the bedroom door. A whiff of medicated air took his breath from him. Lengths of cotton were coiled in their blue paper skins on the table. Bottles stood around the room. A cotton pad hung over the window sill. Drying? Already?

Colleen smiled up at him from the bed. Dan said nothing. Could you speak to your wife so soon afterward? He stood still, watching Colleen's smile broaden into a little laugh.

"What's the matter, Dannie?" she asked.

"Nothing. How do you feel?"

"Fine. How do you feel?"

"Oh, I'm fine."

Mrs. Mayo sent him a look that would have shriveled an obelisk.

"Fine nothing," she informed Colleen. "The poor boy's been worried to death about you."

"Oh, of course," said Dan.

He managed a rather sickly smile. Could he men-

tion the baby now? Was the baby a taboo subject? He supposed not. Mrs. Mayo herself had admitted that there was a baby.

"Where's the kid—er—the baby?"

Dr. Porter drew himself out of a conference with Colleen's nurse. The smile he turned on Dan was hardly heart-warming.

"The kid—er—the baby," he said, "is usually exhibited by the tactful nurse after the kiss that the happy father spontaneously and instinctively gives the young mother."

Dan felt a little sick. Doctors said such things and you just didn't ask them how they got that way. Dan remembered that Mrs. Mayo had said that Dr. Porter was gruff, but "such a darling."

"Such a darling" strapped his bag and departed.

Miss Connor moved starchily across the floor with a new blue blanket held with absurd carefulness in her arms. Oh, the baby was inside!

It was red and small and had its eyes closed. When blanket and contents had returned whence they had come, these were the only impressions retained by Dan—these and one other. It was red and small and had its eyes closed—and something else.

"Isn't he a darling?" asked Mrs. Mayo rapturously.

Just to answer "yes" seemed inadequate.

To say he was red would bring disaster.

To say he had his eyes closed would bring laughter, even from the prostrate Colleen.

To say that the baby looked as if it might at any minute remark on the fact that Dan had not yet kissed Colleen would bring the ambulance from the insane asylum.

"Yes," said Dan.

And the rolls of cotton rustled disapprovingly and the bottles clinked their scorn at the figure of young Dan Russell running down the hall away from his wife and her new-born babe.

Well, anyhow, on bright, sunny mornings, once a fellow got outside the house, it wasn't so bad. Inside, of course, it was terrible. If Colleen wasn't diapering the baby she was sterilizing his bottles. If she wasn't doing that, she was fixing his food—a mystic ritual that in some strange way upset the whole apartment.

It seemed to Dan that, regardless of what Colleen was doing, the brat was howling. Dan knew a guy whose wife had had a kid the same week little Bobby was born, and now, after eight months, the poor guy was still paying the doctor. Dan had never even seen the doctor's bill. He wondered idly just how much money Colleen's mother had. Enough, anyhow, to keep Colleen and the kid in clothes and to pay the rent and come across with the weekly assurance that, in any case, the Russell family wouldn't starve.

Dan wondered if he ought to be ashamed of taking Mrs. Mayo's money. Well, Colleen was her daughter, wasn't she? And if the old lady hadn't come through with a heavy coat that winter, daughter Colleen would have had to freeze.

Dan had had a hard time getting a job. People had to allow for those things. If his father had lived they'd all have been on Easy Street. His father had been a very important man in politics. Repeatedly Dan's father had told him so. Dan hadn't had to work. There'd always been decent clothes and a ten-spot now and again.

But the old man had died, and Dan, wearing his last decent suit, had met Colleen in a dance hall on 110th Street. She was beautiful—no doubt about that. Even guys who trailed around town in big cars took a second look at Colleen.

Dan had been thrilled when she had returned his experimental kiss with unexpected warmth. He'd been a little crazy to speak of marriage, perhaps, when he hadn't a job and was living "off" his sister, who taught school. But Colleen was a nice girl—affectionate, but nice. When you thought of borrowing ten bucks from your sister for a night at a hotel, you thought of a wedding ring, too, where Colleen was concerned. Colleen took care of that.

Within two days he had married her. She wouldn't

take promises. He'd had to marry her, and had to look for an apartment, and had to look for a job, and had to listen to Mrs. Mayo describe what a generous soul she was going to be, and how she'd support Colleen grandly as long as Colleen's husband continued to be of absolutely no account.

And, after all that, what had he got? A baby the first year. And had Colleen broken the news to him gently with a half-finished bootie dangling from a knitting-needle? She had not. She had been violently sick at her stomach one morning, and had called him a fool because he hadn't been married before and didn't know from her actions that they were going to have a precious little baby.

Dan had found a job quickly enough after that. There isn't much fun around a house where a precious little baby is expected. Less fun after it arrives, thought Dan grimly as he turned the smart yellow roadster one door east of Fifth Avenue and stopped in front of a huge apartment house.

He had managed to get a job demonstrating Gillem-Prime roadsters. A straight commission job. Tough luck on the old lady. If Dan's success held out she'd still be supporting his grandchildren.

He had himself announced to a new prospect, and waited politely, hat in hand, for the prospect to arrive. The old lady had had to kick in last week

with a suit of clothes for papa Dannie. A shabby demonstrator couldn't last in his firm, she had at length been made to understand.

Dannie smiled; and Dannie's smile, when it was a mixture of wicked glee and pleasant reminiscence, was a wonderful thing to behold. That smile of Dannie's was the first thing the new prospect saw.

She came toward him wearing a lovely shadow of Dannie's infectious smile.

"How do you do?"

Dannie said, "Miss Gordon?" and looked properly dazzled by Miss Gordon's oriental beauty. Of course, to some people, oriental beauty and a blaze of diamonds totaling somewhere in the neighborhood of forty-four carats seem a bit out of place at 10:30 o'clock in the morning. But Dannie's soul did not cringe, even at a smart sports outfit topped off with high-heeled satin pumps and a diamond anklet.

Dannie lifted Miss Gordon into the Gillem-Prime roadster. No, there wasn't any place she'd like to drive particularly. Yes, it was a beautiful day. Morning, had he said? No, she didn't remember having seen a morning before.

She took deep, appalling drags on a cigarette and sat back in the roadster.

"We've just made a car like this for Princess Valechevelli," said Dannie. "It is particularly adaptable for young ladies to drive because of—"

Miss Gordon turned huge, burning black eyes on Dannie's face.

"Don't do your act," she said. "My buying or not buying doesn't depend on the car. It depends entirely upon what mood I'm in."

Dannie laughed and plunged into the park.

"Anyhow, it's a good car," he said.

Miss Gordon closed her eyes, and even then didn't fail to wave back a cheery salute to a very chic and ugly girl who passed in a foreign car.

"I never miss anything," she remarked idly.

"Then you'll surely not miss the excellence of the Gillem-Prime roadster," Dannie answered, like a figure in a program advertisement.

"All the girls who walk back from automobile rides are sensible, self-respecting girls who won't permit themselves the boredom of listening to a demonstrator praising his car," said Miss Gordon warningly.

"Is that the only thing that would make you walk back?" asked Dannie.

"The only thing," replied Miss Gordon. "And I'm also a heavy drinker, in case it's my habits you're inquiring into."

They got along swiftly after that. Miss Gordon found out his first name and heard about Colleen and the baby.

"Such a model young American," she said mock-

ingly. "A wife and a baby and an apartment uptown. Goodness, don't tell me you're not forging rapidly ahead through a correspondence course!"

"Did anybody ever forge rapidly ahead with a wife and baby hanging on his neck?" asked Dan.

Miss Gordon's eyes sought the topmost point of a far-away tree. She was older than Dannie. She had just remembered something that must have happened about the time when Dannie was getting into long trousers. She laughed the memory away.

Dannie had luncheon with Miss Gordon. Her apartment was tinted an exquisite pale green, and seemed at first glance to be furnished with ash trays and parrakeets. After a few minutes your bewilderment died away and you saw a golden divan, a chair with a back that reached its delicate carvings halfway to the ceiling, a marble nymph. Over puzzling edibles that a silent beige-colored woman served, Miss Gordon announced that she would buy the car if Dannie would teach her to drive.

"Colleen, I swear if that damn kid lets one more yip out of him, I'm going to choke him. I gotta go to work tomorrow. I can't lie here all night and listen to him shout."

"Honey, he's sick. That tooth—"

"Well, if he's sick, get Doc Porter or a dose of arsenic or something."

"Dr. Porter is in midocean with his wife and children."

"Then give the janitress a dollar to keep him in her place again tonight."

"I'm superstitious about that crib of hers, Dan. Her baby died in it, you know."

"Well, take our kid down there and see if we have any luck."

Colleen's mother was furious because Dan hadn't remembered the baby's birthday. She herself had arrived with a little white glimmering cake bearing with absurd dignity its one small candle, a woolly bathrobe, a cow that could utter a mournful *moo*, a Teddy bear, a silver spoon, and a jack-in-the-box.

Bobby stood up in his high chair and screamed lustily with delight.

"You poor baby," said Mrs. Mayo. "Grandmother and poor little mamma have to make up to it for its father's thoughtlessness."

"I got him a kiddie car," said Colleen listlessly.

Mrs. Mayo's lips tightened. "I don't suppose Dan has telephoned or anything," she said.

Colleen flushed. "No," she said. "He's busy, I guess."

"Yes—busy with that woman. I give you my word of honor, Colleen, if your father had ever brought a woman like that into our house, I would have put them both out."

"Oh, mother, it's different now than when you were young. All women look bad. It's the style to wear rouge and extreme clothes."

"I know." Mrs. Mayo paused to prepare the cow for a mighty *moo* and continued:

"The way she acted toward Dan, though—as if she owned him! And he calls her by her first name, whatever it is."

"Adorée," Colleen supplied.

"Yes, Adorée."

Bobby went off into a gale of laughter. Mrs. Mayo plucked him from his throne and held him against her heart.

"Poor baby, you don't realize now, but some day you'll know that your father is the scum of the earth."

Colleen found her mother's eyes and their gazes locked.

"Don't you tell him that—even now," she said tightly. "I don't care what you think, but Bobby's impressions are important."

"Oh, well—" Mrs. Mayo retired defeated. "You picked him and you have him. Thank God, I hadn't one like him."

Later, when Bobby had been tucked into his crib with the jack-in-the-box and his silver spoon for company, Mrs. Mayo took her departure.

"Don't jump on me," she counseled with her

parting kiss; "but, daughter, don't take too much from that yellow-haired bum."

Colleen smiled and promised. She kissed her mother affectionately and listened till the street door slammed. Then she threw herself on the divan—which was not golden, but gray and old rose (ninety-eight dollars, with two chairs to match)—and gave herself up to despair.

At midnight Dan came in. Colleen jumped up quickly from the fretful doze into which she had fallen and ran to the door. Adorée Gordon followed Dan down the hall.

Premonition clutched at Colleen's throat. Climax! There was climax stamped on the overcasual way in which Dan greeted her; climax in the friendly smirk on Miss Gordon's face.

"Are you alone?" Dan asked.

"Yes, I am," answered Colleen. "Mother was here. It's the baby's birthday, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Dan.

Miss Gordon settled herself on the divan and tore her tight turban off her glistening black hair. Dan sat precariously on the arm of a chair.

"Colleen," he said, "I have something to tell you—in fact, we have something to tell you. Did you ever think that perhaps we—"

Miss Gordon coughed into the fur at her throat.

"He'll go by way of China to tell you, Mrs. Rus-

sell," she said. "Briefly, Dan and I are in love with each other, and it's up to you whether you'll give Dan a divorce and let us marry, or whether we'll have to continue as we've been doing for the past few weeks."

It occurred to Colleen, with cool irrelevance, that Miss Gordon was accustomed to telling servants, without loss of breath, exactly what she wanted done.

Dan was obviously embarrassed. He would have preferred a more roundabout method of explanation. He remembered the morning he had seen Adorée buy one hundred acres of land: her expression at this moment reminded him of the real-estate transaction.

Colleen's fingers toyed nervously with the tie on her sweater. She admired Adorée. It would have been impossible for Colleen to have held the situation under full control if she had been a woman calmly asking for another woman's husband! Colleen admired Adorée and gave a short consideration to the dollar sign that brought moral support as well as material luxuries.

"Why, you've rather stunned me," she said. Her hand wandered from the tie to her brown hair. Her fingers raked through it aimlessly. "Understand, I'm not terribly grief-stricken. Dan hasn't been a model husband to me. If you'll just stay awhile and try to act natural—that's for you, Dan—I'll be myself in a minute and we can talk this over."

Miss Gordon's eyes said "Good girl," and Dan developed a sudden thirst that sent him to the kitchen for a glass of water. Colleen sat thinking over her short married life.

Her mother would be glad that she was rid of him. The baby wouldn't miss Dan. And as for herself—she was young yet. She wasn't in love with Dan now. Many a time she had hated him.

Dan returned from the kitchen with a glass of water for Colleen. The slogan from an undertaker's advertisement flitted through Colleen's brain: "A comforting thought that the last service has been done correctly."

She drank the water. Miss Gordon lighted a cigarette. Dan sat down and crossed his legs with painful nonchalance.

"I'm myself again." Colleen smiled across at Adorée. "Of course I haven't been debating whether or not Dan could be free. That goes without saying. He's as free as he likes. It was details I was considering."

"Well, of course," said Dan, "you may keep the baby."

A paroxysm of laughter shattered Colleen's poise. "And the picture of my mother?" she asked. "Oh, Dan, please say I may keep that picture."

Dan colored with annoyance. Some people couldn't keep on talking with impersonal ease.

"I was about to say," said Miss Gordon, "just before Dan made an ass of himself, that I'd like to give your baby a birthday present of ten thousand dollars. Would that be acceptable, Mrs. Russell?"

Colleen shook her head. "That would be profiteering, Miss Gordon," she replied.

"Mayn't I make a settlement on him or you?" Adorée's tone was full of awe.

"No, thank you," said Colleen.

Miss Gordon admired Colleen. It would have been impossible for Miss Gordon to refuse ten thousand dollars, even in her present financial state, and to be situated like Colleen and still have the strength to refuse. Miss Gordon admired Colleen!

The divorce would be arranged without any inconvenience to Mrs. Russell. "Thank you, Mrs. Russell, for being such a beautiful sport." "Don't mention it, Miss Gordon; I don't believe in making difficult situations more difficult." "Good-by, Colleen, you were wonderful. Lots of luck." "Good-by, Dan; be happy; and lots of luck to you, too."

Alone once again. Colleen did not fling herself on the divan this time. She tiptoed into the bedroom and looked down at Bobby. A tear should have dropped tragically on his little upturned, slumber-flushed face. But nary a tear put in its appearance. Colleen slipped out of her clothes and slid between

the cool white sheets of her bed. She was asleep in five minutes.

"Adorée, if that damn mutt of yours don't stop barking I'm going to break his neck. I haven't had any sleep for three nights."

"Dan, you're too funny. After two years of being married to me, don't you know yet that if any neck on these premises gets broken it will be yours?"

"Is that so?"

"Oh, absolutely. I had Binxie before I had you, and I'll have Binxie after you're gone. Now, shut up. I can sleep through his barking, but not through your whining."

Dannie didn't think Europe was so wonderful. Adorée met people whom she knew in every city—as, indeed, she would have in the Sahara Desert. These people were very apt to forget all about Dan and to carry Adorée off somewhere for hours. When he was along he didn't have such a good time, either, for these old friends of Adorée's were always recalling wonderful evenings that had been spent with Adorée and Charles.

"Poor Charles," they would say. "So young to die!"

Adorée would shrug those shoulders and mention the fact that younger men than Charles had perished by the thousands a few years before, and probably

none of them had left a woman as happily placed as Charles had left his beloved Adorée.

It made Dan a bit uncomfortable. Not that Dan was jealous of poor deceased Charles. There were too many rivals this side of Purgatory for Dan to be nursing any grudge against Adorée's former husband, or whatever had been the gentleman's status.

Rivals indeed, and by the carload. Young and very English, Craig was by far the most dangerous. He was Dan's age, but so polished that he radiated little well-groomed points of light. Also, he was poverty-stricken; and the way he could ease smooth wedges of flattery into Adorée's consciousness was a never-ending source of dismay to Dan. Craig was fond of Adorée's dog. Dan began to write finis to this chapter of his life when he discovered that Craig and Binxie were inseparable pals.

When Adorée broke the terrible news to him, he grew cold and sick all over.

She had young Craig with her when she told him. Dannie considered it wretched taste for her to bring Craig along.

"I don't even like you any more, Dan," she said. "I don't intend to marry Richard, so you won't have the chance to hold me up for a nice, stiff price for freedom. If you want to divorce me when you get enough money to do so, go ahead. It's immaterial to me."

"But, Adorée, I'm broke. I haven't a cent."

"That's the way you were when I got you."

"But at least I was in America."

"So you were. Well, I'll give you your passage."

Dan glared at Richard Craig. "And you—I could murder you, you damn wife-stealer."

"Ah, don't murder him, Dannie. Think of all the effort it would take to get manhood enough for that."

"Don't talk so mean to me, Adorée; I love you."

"Yes, you do." Harsh irony was in Adorée's voice. "You love my bank book. A long while ago, Dannie Russell, when you didn't know yet that I was going to own you, I put you wise to the little fact that I miss nothing. You were too dumb to profit by my tip. I know about Helen Banks in London, and that bow-legged brunette in Munich, and the other two also. That's where my money went."

"Why, Adorée!"

"Why, Dan!"

Adorée vanished then, with a gay whisk of a gold-lace flounce and a metallic sparkle of slim, perilous heels. Dan could hear her and Richard Craig laughing at the foot of the stairs.

It was funny to be back in America and to be unattached. Nothing to do—nowhere to go. Adorée had relented at the last moment and given him one hundred dollars over his passage. That wouldn't last

long. He had to get a job. Thank God, he had clothes.

Maybe they'd take him back at the Gillem-Prime place. A job would give him a chance to see people, to make friends. It was as lonesome as the devil, sitting around at nights in a furnished room without a soul to talk to.

They were very sorry at the Gillem-Prime office, but they couldn't take him on now. Oh, yes, they remembered him. He'd left without a notice, hadn't he?

He found that jobs were a little scarce. Of course one would arrive in time, but for the present he'd have to be very careful of his money. It was the cursed loneliness that he minded most, a loneliness that gripped him when night began to fall over the city and lights flamed in a million windows.

He thought of Colleen and Bobby then. Bobby must be almost four years old now. And Colleen—had she married again? He was curious to know what changes the months had brought to her, and he was hungry for companionship.

She had moved from the place where they had lived together. A blonde, curly-haired girl with a sticky child clinging to her skirt lived in that apartment now. She had never heard of Mrs. Dan Russell.

He thought of his sister. He knew he didn't have the nerve to get in touch with her. He owed her

money, borrowed in the days before his marriage to Colleen, that he had not repaid during his days of splendor with Adorée. But it would be some comfort to search for her name in the telephone book and just look at it. She had been a good scout. Poor Catherine, he hadn't treated her right.

He took the book from the floor beneath the community telephone and carried it over to the light. "Russell. Carl Russell. Carrie Russell." There it was—"Catherine Russell." Still at the same address.

That had been a cozy apartment—a lot better than a furnished room. He took his finger off the space directly under Catherine's name and jumped a little. "Colleen Russell." Was it possible? Then she hadn't married again. Where was she living? Holy Mother! On Riverside Drive. What was she doing there?

He rushed impetuously to the telephone—then paused. Perhaps, if he telephoned first, she wouldn't see him. She was probably hitting the high spots—going in for easy money. And what about Bobby? A wave of indignation swept over Dan. The idea of her being loose-moraled when she had her child to think about!

He decided that he'd go over there. If she was out he wouldn't leave his name. He'd just keep going till he found her at home.

It was a private house, and a typical stage butler opened the door. Dan was admitted to a room which

he recognized as the type that always angered Adorée. Adorée hadn't known how to make rooms look spacious and expensive at the same time.

A tall lady with eyes like perfectly matched topazes entered the room with his card in her hand.

"You're—Daniel Russell?" she asked.

"I am."

"How do you do? I'm Mrs. Norris. I've heard about you, of course. Colleen and Bobby are staying here for the season with my husband and me. I intercepted the butler because Colleen has been rather ill and I don't want her upset. Is this to be a strictly social call or do you mean to be unpleasant?"

Meddling, of course, but sweet. Rather beautiful and vaguely familiar. The photograph that hung above her head, of a tragic-looking young man with sideburns, was familiar, too. What was this place?

Dan smiled his winning smile.

"I assure you, Mrs. Norris, I'm only anxious to chat for a pleasant minute or two with Colleen. May I not see her?"

Mrs. Norris melted. "I guess you might," she said with an answering smile.

She turned to go.

"Mrs. Norris, may I ask who is that man?"

She followed Dan's eyes to the photograph. "Why, that's my husband—Newton Norris."

If Dan had not known, he felt that her tone would

have informed him that Newton Norris was the world's most famous film comedian. It was said that he earned one million dollars a year. Dan blinked.

The lovely lady trailed gracefully up the staircase. Abovestairs he heard voices—women's voices. One belonged to Mrs. Norris; the other was Colleen's. It reached across the years and recalled Jerry's garage, Colleen leaning out the window watching for him, dinner steaming on the table. He pulled his hand suddenly out of his pocket. He had been fondling his last twenty-dollar bill.

Mrs. Norris' words could be understood now. She had evidently escorted Colleen to the head of the stairs.

"I told Newt not to let you put your name in the phone book. Everybody who matters knows that you live with us."

Dan stiffened. Everybody who matters, indeed! Then an ex-husband didn't matter to Mrs. Norris. Dan had always heard that moving-picture people held loose views on the matrimonial state.

Before he was fully prepared for it, Colleen bounded into the room. She looked like a child of sixteen. Her hair was cut close to her head and it waved intriguingly. Her figure was slim and boyish.

"Hello, Dan." She seemed to bounce toward him with one hand extended in a friendly yet casual fashion.

Mrs. Norris had reckoned mistakenly when she had pictured a tremulous reunion.

"Hello, Colleen. How're tricks?"

"Fine. And with you?"

"Not so good. Adorée and I split."

Sincere sympathy spread over Colleen's face. She would have been delighted, thought Dan, if she herself were unhappy.

"Too bad, Dannie."

Colleen seated herself.

"How's Bobby?" Dan asked.

"He's fine."

"You're in the movies, eh?"

"I?" Colleen looked shocked. "Goodness, no. What could I do?"

"Well, you're beautiful."

"That isn't enough," said Colleen, "despite public opinion. I'm not deep like Mrs. Norris or brilliant like her husband."

"Oh, you're just staying here?"

"Yes, till Bobby and I go back to Hollywood. The Norrises are going then, too. Bobby has one more picture to finish with Mr. Norris, and then he begins to star in his own right."

"What! Bobby!"

"Why, Dan, haven't you even heard of Bobby Russell? Where have you been? Why, Mr. Norris

thinks Bobby hogged all the honors in their last picture."

"I've been in Europe," said Dan absently.

"So has the picture."

"Adorée didn't care for Mr. Norris," said Dan.

He was stunned. Bobby starring in his own pictures! Colleen looking beautiful and expensive. Dan fingered his last twenty-dollar bill thoughtfully.

"Say, Colleen, I'd like to see the kid."

"He's out driving just now with his governess, and when he comes back he has to take a nap. There's a dinner tonight he must go to."

"You're not trying to keep me from seeing him, are you?" asked Dan suspiciously.

Colleen arose from the chair. "And if I am?"

"Well, look here. If it comes right down to it, you can't keep me from seeing him or from cashing in on his beauty or cleverness or whatever the hell he's got. I'm that kid's father."

The nymph Colleen shook her pretty head gently.

"Dannie, old boy," she said, "you're not. Sorry to break it so crudely, but, you see, Bobby was not premature."

"Why, you little—" An obscene word died on Dannie's lips. Newton Norris strolled past the portières—a careless, quiet reminder that Colleen was among friends.

Colleen threw her head back proudly.

"Your instinct knew he wasn't yours. Did you ever love him? Were you ever even as kind as a stranger might be?"

"I could murder you for this."

"Wait. What have I done to you, after all? You wanted me. I didn't force myself on you. I gave myself unstintingly and was faithful to you throughout our married life. Never a cent of your money was spent on Bobby or me, and I released you when you wanted to go. Now what do I owe you?"

A new thought struck Dan.

"You're a liar," he said decidedly. "Your afraid of me touching Bobby's money. He *is* mine."

"Ask Dr. Porter," advised Colleen. "He knew about it before I even met you."

"Yes; and I'll bet that Dr. Porter—"

Newton Norris stuck his famous head between the portières.

"Have you seen my book, Colleen?" he asked.

"No," said Colleen.

Newton Norris withdrew. Dan smiled. It had been so obvious a little trick. If Colleen had wanted Dan thrown out, she was to have answered "yes" to Norris' question.

He drew himself together. "Well, I guess I'll be going," he said.

He walked toward the door and Colleen followed.

"Dan, are you in any trouble?"

"What do you mean, trouble?"

"I mean money trouble."

Dan looked down at his shoes and registered refined reticence. "Well, to tell the truth, Colleen—"

A glimmer of jewels as a tiny purse flashed out of Colleen's pocket.

So she had come to meet him prepared. The little—! She'd expected him to ask for money. Well, he'd be damned if he'd—

"Here's fifty, Dan," said Colleen.

"Gee, thanks, Col."

Dan's hand closed over the bill. The door slammed behind him.

X. ALTHEA

She Saw Two Feet Ahead of Her

It was many years before Kent Romley noticed that his mother's eyes were blue. They had always seemed to him infinitely dark and secretive. But they were blue like a baby's eyes, like a little cornflower, like the dear, protecting sky that bent above the world.

Blue, his mother's eyes. A deep blue, to be sure, but still blue. A comforting thought, that. The adventuresses in books always had flashing brown or black eyes. But his mother's eyes were blue. That was enough to buck a fellow up.

Kent thought that perhaps he'd mention it to Daddy. Maybe Daddy would be pleased to know that Mother's eyes were blue. It might make a difference. You never could tell. It was the little things in the world that made the difference.

Even at seven Kent Romley knew that it was the little things in the world that made the difference. He had found it out on the day that Mother hadn't cared about Daddy's college winning every football game of the season. Daddy had cared awfully. He

had been so exuberant that he had thrown sofa pillows about the living room and had shattered a china clown who had stood clasping a china guitar for many a year.

Mother had looked almost as though she thought Daddy ridiculous. Daddy had seen the look on her face and suddenly he didn't care about his college either. He returned the pillows to their rightful places and began to pick up the pieces of the china clown.

Kent saw the expression on Daddy's face. Always after that he associated that expression with the smiling clown who even after his destruction clung valiantly to his guitar.

The china-clown expression of Daddy's reappeared frequently once it had been noticed. It came when Daddy had the Salzers to dinner. Mrs. Salzer was a rough-and-ready woman, Kent heard Daddy say. Mother was not a rough-and-ready woman. Mother liked rich perfumes and soft silks. Mrs. Salzer had ugly hands. She talked about shooting rabbits up-State. Mother couldn't eat her dessert. Daddy wore his china-clown expression. The Salzers were his friends.

Kent felt sorry for Daddy.

Maybe there was a lot to be said for Mother, but she was always spoiling a person's fun. Always looking white and a little tragic. And she looked some-

thing else, too. Kent had heard Mrs. Reynolds say that his mother looked decadent. He had found the word in the dictionary.

He supposed that Mrs. Reynolds had meant the deep shadows under Mother's eyes, the way that Mother continually smoked, and the bitter smile she wore when people were making a big fuss over something like a football game.

Daddy wasn't a bit that way. He was a great outdoors man and he had ideals: Mrs. Reynolds had said so. He loved his home town and his friends and his country. He was a good son, a good husband, and a good father. Kent knew that everybody adored Daddy and he knew that Mother wasn't popular. He felt sorry for her until he remembered how she was always spoiling a person's fun.

Sometimes he thought of how, when he grew older, Daddy and he would see the world together. They would stalk lions in the jungles and catch great, strange, glimmering fish in distant oceans. Somehow there was never a place for Mother in his plans. He felt ashamed of his disloyalty, but he could not dream her into the picture.

When he was older and had been gently led via the animal-and-flower route to the truth and understanding of how he happened to be on earth, he felt more disloyal than ever. Daddy told him about life,

and later he went out on the porch and sat and looked at his mother.

Had she been glad when God had signified that Kent was coming? Had she looked up at the sky and smiled at God in that bitter little way of hers? Had she made Daddy wear his china-clown expression?

She looked at him then. She turned her eyes upon her son and regarded him speculatively. It occurred to him that she paid less attention to him than Daddy did. He could not talk to her. Her hair was a hard, golden helmet through which his voice and his thoughts did not penetrate. But it was she who with suffering and anguish had given him a place on this earth. Oh, he must find a way for her to go, too, when he and Daddy made their trip around the world.

Later he decided that he wouldn't take her. But that was much later. After he had been sent away to school. It was Mother's fault that he had been sent miles and miles away from home. Mother and Daddy quarreled a great deal, and Daddy explained to Kent that he would be happier if he were not in an atmosphere of constant conflict. It was Mother's fault, because she started the quarrels. Some of them were asinine.

One of the quarrels had been about religion. Daddy had said something scathing about a certain

belief. It was not the belief to which Mother had been reared, nor even any of her friends. But she had resented Daddy's slur. Her lips had grown white with her rage.

"I will not have you say that again before the boy," she stormed. "I will not have him face the world with an armor of prejudice carefully guarding from the truth the misinformation you've given him."

"That's not misinformation, Nona. He might as well know that everybody in the world isn't the same sort that he's met through us."

"Do you think that these thousands of people that you've damned in the boy's eyes will suffer for want of his friendship? He'll suffer for want of theirs, if you send him away from them. You're narrow-minded and bigoted and you're a corrupt influence, just as is everybody else who can't see further than his own church!"

"Nona, Nona!"

Mr. Gregory, the head of Kent's school, frowned at Mother before the other teachers at coffeetime. It was because Mother, on her visit to the school, had smoked a cigarette. Kent wished she hadn't come—the teachers stared at her so. Mr. Richards looked at her as though he'd never before seen a woman. Mother had smiled at Mr. Richards. Mr. Richards had smiled at Mother.

Mother said: "So this is where my son is to become a fine, noble American? This is where he is to learn his reverence and gentlemanliness toward American womanhood?"

Mr. Richards had stopped smiling. He had moved hastily away as though Mother had just told him that her hand bag was full of dynamite.

It was all very unpleasant and incomprehensible.

The school years passed. Mother never came again to visit. Dad came often. He was bronzed and bright-eyed. Congenial with the teachers and boys alike. Everybody liked him.

Mr. Gregory said he was the ideal type of man. He also said that he hoped that Kent would be like his father, but Mr. Gregory had looked doubtful when he said it. He was thinking of a divinely white hand holding a cigarette and of Mr. Richards' bewildered eyes on a morning long ago.

Two summers Dad had met Kent at the school and had taken him camping in Maine. There had been no mention of Mother or home. Kent did not question. He wondered, though. Wondered what Mother did when he and Dad were away. Read, probably. She was not invited about much. After all, that was not her home town, but Dad's. People never liked Mother much.

The year that Kent left school he went home.

There would have to be college, of course, but not right away. He wouldn't be eighteen for months yet. There was time.

Mother met him at the station with the car. She kissed him and said that he was a man now. She looked the same as always. Young, tragic when her face was in repose, and bitter when she was speaking or smiling.

"Have you learned how to be a model young man?" she asked. "Do you know which religions to hate and just how many hands the Germans have cut off Belgian babies?"

"Don't talk lightly, Mother," he rebuked her. "Europe is seeing a beast gone wild."

"Heavens, you have learned!" she said, and her mouth was wide with laughter, but her eyes looked very sad.

"The war is terrible," Kent continued.

"You'll find out how terrible it is when your father starts talking tonight," she said.

"Well, it is, you know, Mother."

"Kent, did you ever hear the expression 'too terrible for words'?"

Kent nodded.

"Doesn't it mean anything? Doesn't it carry a message to people who rave and rant because they like to hear themselves talk?"

Kent shot a quick look at his mother. This was the

first time she had ever said a mean thing of Dad behind his back. He feared that there would be many quarrels at home. The European war would be an excuse for his parents to wrangle, an impersonal argument in which they could rid themselves of personal grievances, as his mother, years before, had found in a religious discussion a chance to call Dad narrow-minded and bigoted.

But there were no quarrels at home. The quarrel stage had passed. The parents of Kent Romley were now distantly polite to each other—remote. It struck Kent as terribly sad. Once they had loved each other enough to marry, enough to choose this house to live in together forever. Now they were separated by an insurmountable wall. They did not understand each other. There was nothing about Dad that any one could criticize, so it must be Mother's fault. They made each other wretchedly unhappy. That much could be seen in the eyes of either of them. Unhappy people, wasting each other's lives, hurting each other, each watching for signs of enmity in the other. Miserably unhappy. Mother in jade-green satin, looking exquisite but lonely. Dad tanned and healthy, wearing his china-clown expression.

Dad was taking Kent on a week-end to the Salzers' place. Mother knew about it. That was why Dad was wearing his china-clown expression. Poor Dad! He was trying to make dinner such a merry meal, too.

He told all the jokes that he knew. None of them was very recent, but Mother could have laughed at them. She wouldn't, though. It occurred to Kent that she liked to make people uncomfortable.

After dinner Dad and he stood in the foyer waiting for the car to be brought around. Mother stood silently near, a green-and-golden flame, slim and graceful. Dad went upstairs to get a few more cigars. Kent and his mother stood alone in the foyer.

"It's a long time since I've seen you," she said.

"Yes, and now I'm going away again." He spoke to make conversation, hardly conscious of his words.

"Yes," she said; "but you'll be back Monday morning, won't you?"

Kent nodded. Did she mind his going away? Was that possible?

"What do you do when you're alone?" he asked. "Do you miss us?"

"Did I ever strike you as being sentimental, Kent?"

"No, you never did."

"And I hope I never shall. Sentimentality is sickening and oozy. I don't miss anybody. I don't care what anybody does. I don't care whether people like me or not. I'm sufficient unto myself. One's sentimentality depends on other people."

"No," said Kent in the slow, explanatory tone of

youth. "You could be sentimental about a house."

"Not this house," said his mother, and she turned and walked swiftly up the stairs. It struck Kent as beastly that she didn't say good-by.

America was in the war. Kent was past eighteen and there was Althea—Althea, who shouted when the national anthem was played, who smiled and wept over the boys who were going, Althea, who had wind-blown hair and mist-gray eyes. Kent was going, too. He had to go because he was an American, a man, and because he loved Althea.

His father was proud but sad-eyed. On the evening of the day which had seen Kent's enlistment, Philip Romley had patted his son on the shoulder and had gone to his room to sit for hours alone. Kent and his mother faced each other across the library table.

"You don't know what you are doing," she said.

There was a lifelessness in her voice. It sounded like an old voice, a very tired voice. Her eyes wandered over the figure of her son. He was tall and blond. Young, vigorous, and so alive.

"I'm going," he said, "because I love my country."

"You're going because you're smitten by the charms of a flag-waving girl. If she were a pacifist we'd hear a different story from you."

"I don't think so," Kent said. "I'm not going because of Althea's feelings. I'm going because it's the duty of every able man."

"You're not a man yet."

"Man enough to offer myself for war."

"Don't be absurd. You've thought of nothing but Althea's approval, waving flags, and shouting people. You haven't thought of the possible consequences. Have you thought of yourself—"

"Killed? Yes."

Kent's mother rose from her chair and stood above him with drooping white shoulders and eyes that were not quite sane.

"Killed!" she cried. "Do you know that's the least of it? Think of yourself at eighteen with your life before you, brought back a hopeless cripple. Good God! Crippled but besmirched with glory. Useless to yourself, but remembered kindly once a year by the town."

"That's the chance a man takes in war."

"It's all rot. Feverish, hectic propaganda that lures a young man to his destruction. That girl is part of it. She with her knitting and bandage-rolling! What right has she to talk a boy into dying in a foreign land? She doesn't have to go. She has nobody to offer except the young fools who listen to her. What does she care that young lives are cut down—"

"Wait a minute, Mother. I think I see what is

causing this outburst. You're afraid I'll be hurt. Please don't worry about that."

She turned on him fiercely. "I won't worry. I'll leave that for your father and Althea. I'm going to forget that you're in the army. You see, I'm not one of these red-blooded American mothers."

"People will think you pro-German."

She laughed then. "Must one be pro-something?"

"Of course."

"You think God is pro-Allies?"

"Mother, you ask the darnedest questions."

"Your father thinks so, too, Kent."

His conversation with her was forgotten when Althea put her arms around him and let him kiss her on her warm, red lips. She called him her brave soldier boy and said she would always love him.

The glow around his heart lasted all through the days at camp and he still had it with him when he sailed for France.

And, after all, Kent Romley returned whole and well from the war. His father broke down and wept with relief when he saw him. His mother kissed him silently. He noticed that all the way home she never let go of his hand which he gave her in greeting. She held her silence, though, and that was just like her. Not interested, not full of questions like Dad.

Althea ran across the street to see him. She was full of love and pride and gossip. Later she made a

few little confessions. There was a good-looking ensign who had taken her out many times. A civilian had kissed her.

But now that Kent was back she couldn't even remember what they had looked like. Kent held her in his arms and forgave her for her philandering. She was so lovely.

Dad spoke of college, but somehow college didn't seem the important thing it once had. Dad didn't appear to grasp the fact that a fellow's sense of values changes. Mother seemed to understand about that, but she didn't understand about Althea.

"Puppy love," she said, when Kent told her solemnly that he was going to marry Althea.

"There's nothing finer than puppy love," Kent reminded her. "I read that somewhere and it's true. Puppy love is sweet and wholesome and even noble."

"It's something that gets you into deep water," Mother said. "It seems simple and uncomplicated, and before you know it you have a sticky mess of involvements on your hands."

"You're always spoiling people's pleasure," Kent said.

"Yes, that's a nasty thing about a woman who can see two feet ahead of her nose."

"You think you can, but nobody can."

"Can't I? I know you're going to marry Althea

and I know you're going to crash your marriage on the rocks if I don't help."

"If *you* don't help?"

"Seems strange, doesn't it, sonny-boy, that I think I'm so important to you? Such a thoroughly unpleasant woman as I've always been."

"Mother, please don't take that tone."

. . . . . .

It was a nice little wedding, after all. It took place just before Kent was twenty-two. They had meant it to be sooner, but there had been Dad's illness and death, which delayed things.

Kent had grieved greatly at the loss of his father. It seemed so strange that they had never stalked lions or fished in exotic seas. But there was a look on his father's face which was a comfort. Peace at last. He was free of the union which had brought him so many years of unhappiness. What mattered it whose fault the misery had been? It had been there. A black, tangible thing which had steeped the parents of Kent Romley in gloom.

Mother had not cried at the funeral, but she had looked very sad. Perhaps she was thinking of the day when she hadn't cared that Daddy's college had won every game of the season.

She was very kind to Kent in the days that followed. She was very kind to Althea, and months

later it was she who engineered all the plans for the wedding.

Althea came to live with them and Kent took over his father's business. The two Mrs. Romleys spent all their days together.

"Your mother is a peculiar woman, Kent, but I think I love her."

"She's never understood me."

"Oh, you fool!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because you're talking just the way a fool would talk. You've never loved her because she understands too well. When she sees something absurd, she knows it's absurd and she's too big to call it more pleasant names. She knows the weaknesses of people and has never steeled herself against recognizing them."

"Very unpleasant," remarked Kent.

And Nona Romley watched the two together. Kent liked to go fishing. Althea liked to go fishing. Kent enjoyed duck shooting. Althea enjoyed sitting in the boat and watching. Kent liked detective stories. Althea adored them. They read aloud to each other and shared the bafflement.

Often their light young laughter rippled through the house and Nona Romley listened. They were congenial and happy. She would shut her eyes and listen to their laughter. Sometimes when a sharp pain caught her she could forget it for a second in the

pleasure of hearing Althea's voice raised in childish delight: "Didn't I tell you the doctor was the murderer?"

It was the happiest time of Kent Romley's life. His observations of married love had never led him to believe that a woman could be such a pal as Althea was, such a complete all-around companion. Mrs. Salzer was not finicky like most women, but she was ugly and had no sense of humor and she looked hideous riding a horse. Althea was all a man could ask out of life.

It was Dr. Lawrence who told Kent that his mother was a sick woman. There would have to be an operation. It was a chance. It would either be a complete success or else— Dr. Lawrence shook his head solemnly to complete the sentence.

Kent told Althea about it and all night she cried into her pillow. Her mother-in-law was her friend. She could understand how a girl could kiss a handsome civilian and still write love letters to a boy in France.

Nona Romley went stoically to the hospital. From the running board of the car she laughed down into Althea's frightened eyes.

"Don't worry, child. I need an operation. I've never had any good conversation material for the women in town. When I come back I'll be popular

with them. The heroine of the town's most recent operation."

She got into the car and closed the door.

It occurred to the young Romleys that she must think it a trifling thing, for she hadn't even bothered to kiss them good-by. Later they found that she had destroyed the stacks of old letters which she had kept in her desk as long as Kent could remember, and that she had laid a white chiffon dress over the foot of her bed.

The operation took place the next morning. Althea had not slept that night and Kent found himself jumpy and restless.

"Oh, Kent, I hope she's all right," said Althea.

"She'll be, honey. She's strong." He tried to sound casual and light. "Isn't it lucky this didn't happen the day before yesterday? Wouldn't it be terrible to spend our wedding anniversary like this?"

"Yes," said Althea. "It was like her to think of that."

Nona Romley died under the ether. Kent felt badly, but his grief was not comparable to what he had felt when he lost his father. Dad had been so cheerful. He'd been like a merry tune that God had whistled to delight all those within hearing distance.

Mother, of course, had been different. She'd been sort of a radical. That was a word that he'd been hearing a lot at Rotary luncheons. She'd been un-

pleasant, but she was dead now. Not decent to think anything but respectful thoughts of her.

Still, Althea would probably have a baby the third or fourth year of their marriage, and it was just as well that Mother wouldn't be there to strip the event of the glamour it would have for the expectant father.

He'd suffered a proper amount of grief and he'd closed the piano and had managed to remember Mother's less unpleasant moments. He might even have had a photograph enlarged and hung in the library, but he found the note. She had placed it in his bureau drawer on the day that she left for the hospital.

He saw red. He swore at this final thoroughly unpleasant gesture of a thoroughly unpleasant woman. Foul-minded. Obscene. It was sealed. He did not open it. He wanted to open it, read it, and throw it away, but something restrained him—the superstition, perhaps, that made him put the vile thing back among his belongings.

It didn't seem right to dishonor this letter from his dead mother, but he cursed again when he thought of what he had seen on the envelope:

TO MY SON

To be opened when his
wife is unfaithful to him

Her legacy—this filthy inference that some day Althea would give herself to another man. He longed to tell Althea of the letter, but he felt somehow that she would not be grateful for his telling. She had loved his mother and so few people had that perhaps it was kindest not to disillusion her. Though at that moment Kent felt that he owed his mother nothing.

The second year of his life with Althea passed swiftly. There was so much to do, so much to enjoy. Happiness was theirs—a complete happiness that must have made the old house wonder. Everything in common—their tastes were almost identical—and they loved each other so.

Kent brought Curtis Glynn home to dinner unexpectedly one night. Glynn was a business acquaintance, a nice fellow, too. It dismayed Kent to find that Althea and Curtis were acquainted. In fact, Curtis was the civilian that Althea had kissed back in the old days when Kent was in France.

But the three of them got to joking and laughing, and Kent recalled that they'd all been kids then and, after all, Curtis was a fine fellow. He noticed that Curtis stared at Althea a great deal, but Althea was so pretty that any man would.

It did seem funny, though, that after that dinner Curtis made it a point to see the Romleys once a

week. He invited them to dinner at his hotel and then they returned the hospitality. Once Kent pretended that he didn't feel like going to dinner with Curtis and urged Althea to go. She refused and he was content. Everything was all right. Kent's suspicions died.

In March, Kent had to go to New York on business. It would take only a day to transact the affair, but his presence was necessary. Althea wanted to go, too. She made quite a point about going.

Kent said it was foolish. He had always been economical and slow to squander money. The fare to New York, he explained, was enough with which to buy herself some hats or something useful. It was absurd to throw it away on a tedious ride, and he'd be back shortly.

But he wasn't back shortly. The business dragged. His continued presence was vital to his future success. It was three weeks before he stood again in his own hallway and set down his bag.

Althea kissed him and burst into tears. He patted her soothingly. Poor dear, she had been lonely. If he had known how long it was to be he would certainly have taken her. She was so glad to see him and so eager to wait on him. Her eyes were bright with something he had never seen in any woman's eyes before.

That night she sat on his lap and hugged him. "I

love you," she said, "but I've been alone and I'm lost when I'm alone. I don't know how to amuse myself."

It was all very strange, he thought, but he laid it to the extreme loneliness she must have felt without him.

He had been home two days when the letter came. It was a typewritten letter and unsigned:

"Curtis Glynn was not in his room at the hotel on the night of the tenth. He did not come in till morning. Your wife was absent from your house at corresponding hours. There is an inn with lax principles not far from here. A word to the wise is sufficient."

Kent stared at the letter. Somehow, on that sheet of ugly words and meanings he saw what he knew to be the truth. She had been unfaithful to him, and had been recognized probably by some mischievous attaché of the inn. He saw it all now. Her tears at their meeting, her eagerness to be of service to him, and the look in her eyes which had been contrition. She was sorry—but what good was that?

He paced the floor feverishly. She was not in, otherwise he would have shouted for her and perhaps killed her when she fluttered across the threshold of his room. It would be a joy to shake the lying, faithless life out of her, then to step over her as she lay

on the floor and go find Curtis Glynn. It would be pleasant to kill both of them—to know that they couldn't do this to him again. If she were only here!

For an hour he walked the floor with mad haste. His blind rage disappeared. He forgot that he had thought of murder. His mind dwelt on confronting Curtis and Althea. He wanted to hear their story. Then he wanted to beat Curtis to a pulp and throw Althea to him.

If anybody had ever told him that Althea would do this! Then suddenly it seemed to Kent that somebody had told him she would. He remembered his mother's letter.

He went to his bureau and threw articles left and right in an effort to find that letter. He found it and ripped it open. One line stared up at him from the paper. Only one line:

"My son, I was never unfaithful to your father."

He threw the letter from him. That was his mother's message. A smug, self-satisfied assurance that she was a creature far superior to Althea. She, superior! She who had made his father's life wretched and unhappy and empty.

But wait! Kent picked the paper up and read the solitary line again. There was the key to her message. His father's unhappy life. She had never been unfaithful to him, but just the same they had been

miserable, tortured, and remote from each other.

Then fidelity was not the biggest thing in marriage. There were other things. The little things, he had noticed so many years ago, like being glad over a football game.

He and Althea had been happy and in key with each other, but she had gone to another man. On the other hand, his mother had remained faithful and still had not secured happiness for herself and her husband. Was it possible that fidelity was not the biggest thing in marriage? Was this his mother's message to him? With that one line did she say a volume of infinite truth?

He had only to remember the gloom-soaked house, his father's china-clown expression, and his mother's bitter little smile to believe that, after all, comradery at the library table might be more important than fidelity to the marriage bed.

It occurred to him as he passed through the foyer that perhaps that thoroughly unpleasant woman—his mother—had been able to see two feet ahead of her nose.

XI. PRUDY

The Sword of Damocles

Prudy King was the daughter of Bob King and Miss Wells. It sounds most irregular, but, you see, Miss Wells didn't marry till she was far past thirty, and people had become so accustomed to calling her Miss Wells that they couldn't get out of the habit.

Nobody ever expected that she would get married. Miss Wells expected it least of all. She was too tall, too thin, and too grouchy. She was the best seamstress in Wickesville. You simply detested her, but she did sew so well, my dear.

She was thirty-three when a theatrical troupe burst upon the sylvan calm of Wickesville. They played four days and lingered four weeks. Then, one by one, they left town as friends and relatives from distant cities replied to their distress signals.

In time all the stranded barnstormers had departed from Wickesville—all but Bob King. He hadn't a friend or a relative in the world. He was an extremely unamusing comedian, and viewed from even an untheatrical angle, Bob King wasn't much.

Miss Wells found him ill and hungry, lying asleep in her back yard. She kicked him experimentally and he opened his eyes. He had brown eyes. Miss Wells was partial to brown eyes. She dragged him through her kitchen door and deposited him on the sofa which had recently been demoted from the back parlor. Then she called for the doctor.

"He won't live," said the doctor. "Exposure, starvation, and a complete giving up of will. He can't live."

Miss Wells had always disagreed with the doctor, and besides she hated any one who made positive statements.

Bob King lived and he became Miss Wells' husband. Two years later he became the father of Miss Wells' daughter, Prudence, and simultaneously he became Miss Wells' widower. Miss Wells had left him the house, two thousand dollars, and the baby. He sold the house, spent the money, and gave the baby to some people named Mortimer who needed a baby.

For nine years he made a living in Wickesville reporting for the Wickesville *News* at two dollars a report. At the end of that time he went to Chicago to resume his dramatic career, and he died a year later of exposure, starvation, and a complete giving up of will.

Prudy King was twelve years old when the Mor-

timers got around to telling her that her father was dead. She said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

Mr. Mortimer said, "You were, several years ago," and the subject was dropped.

The Mortimers lived over near the railroad tracks in a drafty barnlike house which had depressingly large rooms. Mrs. Mortimer liked to say that you could dance in any one of her rooms. She didn't mention that nobody ever felt like it. Mr. Mortimer was a foreman in the Greer canning factory. They were common people, with a rough generosity and hearty prejudices.

They thought that their adopted daughter was as good as they could have hoped for under the circumstances, and they treated her as one of themselves—an adult Mortimer. At the age of ten, Prudy had brought home the tidings that Mrs. Teilford looked as though she was going to have another baby, and two years before that she had begun to abuse Mr. Mortimer in round, Anglo-Saxon terms during strife.

"Your mother wouldn't approve of that." Mrs. Mortimer's corrections were languid.

"No," Prudy replied, "she wouldn't approve of me cussin', but she'd think I was damn' cute because I did it."

And with those words she proved herself the only

person in Wickesville who understood Miss Wells' marriage.

Prudy's scholastic career was most desultory. At fifteen she found herself a job. She went to work in the Kind Thought Shop. John Shores was the proprietor. She sold elaborately ribboned boxes of candy, baskets of fruit, brightly colored jars of preserves, and all kinds of nuts. Prudy got six dollars a week and the hours were from nine to nine.

Perhaps it was the sober richness of the shop, perhaps it was the new contact with the Wickesville plutocrats, or perhaps it was that she had just grown up, but certainly a change came over Prudy King in the two years that she worked in the Kind Thought Shop. Her voice softened and she learned to use a light, scornful laugh—a deadlier weapon than profanity.

Her hair, which had been a bright, flaming cerise, had taken its cue from Prudy's manner and had faded to a deep warm russet. Her figure was trim and alluring. The eyes of Prudy King were brown and sparkling and, like the eyes of other seventeen-year-old girls, questing, flirtatious, and expectant.

Her heart leaped and fluttered when young, good-looking men stared at her. She loved to be admired. She enjoyed walking down Maple Avenue and counting the smiles and nods she got from the youth

of Wickesville. Then into the shop she would go and sling her hat on a peg and go to work without a look at John Shores.

Had she ever looked at him during one of those moments when she sat in the back of the shop, mending a run in her stocking or combing out her hair, she would have been surprised at the expression in his eyes. But she never looked, for he was thirty and married and she was seventeen and had the world before her.

Sometimes they held short conversations, mostly about the Kind Thought Shop. John Shores would sit in front of the candy case and allow an expression of discontent to crawl across his face, obliterating his professional smile and the bright, helpful look he wore during store hours.

"This shop is five years ahead of Wickesville," he would say. "I brought the notion from Chicago. This town's going to grow, though. It will grow north. Where Crazy Ned's farm is there'll be a bank five years from now. I got to move up that way and be first in the new thoroughfare."

Prudy would swing her legs back and forth and say, "Um," "I suppose so," and "Just imagine!" John Shores was nice enough and not bad to look at, but what a bore.

Thus Prudy King.

When Garlock Greer came home from his Eastern

college, she saw his green-and-silver roadster fly past the door of the Kind Thought Shop. She had not seen him since the days when she had been a long-legged, freckle-faced child in gingham knee-length dresses. She had never known him. He was Garlock Greer.

She walked away from the window of the shop and went to look at herself in the little mirror in the back. She tried combing her hair a new way.

He happened into the shop two days later. He bought a box of chocolates. Prudy smiled at him across the counter and a harassed expression crossed his face as though he were being forced into making a decision.

He had a pair of solemn blue eyes and the Greer profile. His parents were very proud of him. He was handsome, fair-minded, and even-tempered. His mouth made you wonder a little. It had eager, sensuous lips that were conscious of their unseemliness and made an admirable effort to conform to the Greer standard. That mouth made you think of a spy in an enemy camp doing his best to pass unnoticed.

"So you've come back to Wickesville?" said Prudy.

Garlock's brow puckered. "You weren't here when I left," he said.

"Yes, I was."

"Then why did I leave, I wonder."

There was little more than that to their conversation. But somehow, at closing time that night, Prudy found herself in the green-and-silver roadster, flashing over moonlit roads with Garlock Greer.

He brought her home at midnight—safe, unkissed, and terribly in love. She thought that this was the first time in fact or fiction that the Great Young Man of a town was adored by a little insignificant redhead.

After that he met her every night at closing time. He was kind to her. His kisses were tender, unalarming. She didn't mind that he stayed away from Maple Avenue where people would see them together.

It was on a blustering night in November that John Shores seized her wrist as she ran to join Garlock.

"Prudy," he said, "wait. Let me talk to you. What do you want to chase after him for?"

She gasped and looked at Shores with wide, staring eyes.

"Chase after him?"

"Well, you know what I mean. He's after only one thing—"

Prudy tore away from John Shores. She was angry at the interpretation he put upon Garland's beautiful courtship.

"You're jealous!" she cried, with a sudden light-

ning flash of instinct. "You'd like to have me yourself, but you never will!"

She was wrong. At twelve o'clock Christmas Eve she sat stupidly in a chair at the back of the Kind Thought Shop and tried to figure out why she had been such a fool.

John Shores, white and tragic, paced the shop. He had kept open later than usual in anticipation of a last-minute gift rush. It had not come. Climax had come instead. A quart of Scotch, a holiday mood, a girl who had never been lit before, and a man—himself—who for months had passionately wanted the girl. But now they were sober.

"My God, Prudy, you'll keep this quiet, won't you? My wife—if she ever knew—"

Her eyes, filled with a burning scorn, fixed themselves upon him.

"If you don't say anything, nobody will ever know," he ran on. "Garlock Greer might even marry you. Don't let him know that you're easy, though, or he won't."

"Thanks for the advice," she said. There wasn't any more to say. Probably he wouldn't believe that his liquor had made her reckless, silly, and that in its golden warmth she had entertained a notion that nothing counted in this lovely old world.

"I wouldn't be surprised if Greer did marry you," he said magnanimously.

"He won't," she said, rising from the chair.

"Why not?" He thrust his question at her sharply as she stood in slim, dark relief against the wall.

"Because I wouldn't let him," she said. She laughed a litle wildly as she added, "You see, Mr. Shores, I'm not that kind of a girl."

John Shores thought swiftly. If she didn't want to marry Garlock Greer, then perhaps she would not guard their secret. She would be a constant worry to him, a sword of Damocles.

"Why don't you leave Wickesville?" he asked with sudden inspiration. "There aren't any men here worthy of you, anyhow. I'd give you three hundred dollars in case you felt like going somewhere else."

After he spoke he feared that he had been too crude, too obvious.

Her answer amazed him. "Make it four hundred," she said, "and it's a go."

And that's the way life was. One day you were expecting a proposal from the most wonderful man in the world and the next day you weren't eligible to be his wife. So you left the place where you would be constantly seeing him and went to New York.

Bob King, on his visits to the Mortimers, had given his daughter an interest in dancing. From early childhood she had done back bends, cart wheels, splits, and all the other highly regarded feats peculiar to acrobatic dancers. She had no technique and

merely any slim girl's grace. This carelessly acquired talent must serve her now.

She settled in a rooming-house that was not too clean nor too moral and began a round of the theatrical offices. She did not get work at once, but she did meet a lot of people. Other girls looking for work. Through one of these sisters in distress she met Anthony.

He was English. His clothes were threadbare, but his linen was clean. He was tall and a trifle underweight. Prudy thought him very attractive. He was a puzzle to her. She could not tell whether he was young or not.

She sat on a sofa with him up in Florrie Morton's room. The phonograph played and ice tinkled in frosted glasses. People howled with laughter and shouted every thought which they desired to convey. Presently Prudy King found herself telling Anthony Pierce what she had never expected to tell to a living soul.

"And so you gave up your comfortable bed with the Mortimers," he said when she had concluded.

"Yes; you see, I couldn't stay there. I couldn't see him every day knowing that I could never marry him."

Anthony's brows drew together in a quizzing pucker.

"Let me get this straight, my dear," he said.

"Because this Shores person did what he did you would forgo the opportunity of becoming the other chap's wife?"

"But what else could I do? Garlock is too wonderful and clean to be saddled with a woman who had belonged to some one else. He would have married me—I know he would. But I wouldn't have let him."

Pierce tapped his long, slim fingers meditatively upon the arm of the sofa.

"And now what do you want out of life?" he asked.

Prudy King's eyes glowed with a murky flame. "I want," she said, "to make John Shores sorry. Somehow, some way, he's going to feel as I felt when I saw the lights of Wickesville and the Greer mansion fading out of sight."

"Oh, revenge was the motive," Anthony hissed. "She murdered him because he wronged her in her youth."

Prudy shook her head. "No," she said; "I shan't murder him."

Anthony laughed. He had a very nice laugh.

"And what do you do for a living?" she asked.

"I tell dirty stories at stag entertainments," he said simply.

"Good God!" Prudy gasped. "What a career!"

"Well, it pays fairly well," he said.

"Can't you work in vaudeville or a show or something? Why dirty stories at stags?"

"Because I must have my afternoons and mornings free."

"Why?"

"Ah, why indeed?" said Anthony, and acted as though Prudy's question had been answered. . .

"What do you do for a living?" he asked, after a moment.

"I'm trying to get a job dancing."

"What! You haven't a job! Good God, how distressing! And you're a dancer. You must let me get you a job. You've probably got a rotten approach. I'll be your manager and perhaps we can keep each other from starving."

And so the partnership began. Prudy King, with her brazen eyes and her childish mouth that told the world that she wasn't brazen at all, and Anthony Pierce, attractive, penniless, and impenetrable.

He got her a job. It was in a cheap café on Seventh Avenue. Prudy was to have a costume that no one had worn before, a dressing-room to herself, and fifty dollars a week. Out of this Anthony was to have ten dollars every Sunday night.

"Now, my darling managee," said Anthony, "you must have dancing lessons. Until we can afford more you must take one lesson a week."

Prudy took a lesson a week. The sixth week that

she was dancing in the Naples Café she had an offer of a better job. The owner of Salmoe's had to know by six o'clock that evening whether or not Prudy would take it.

She could give no answer till she had conferred with Anthony. He was not to be found before seven in the evening and he had no telephone. She knew where he lived, but she hated to go to his place. People said that he smoked opium and lay around all day building dope castles.

Still, if he was her manager he had to be consulted. He lived farther uptown. It was twenty minutes in the subway. She found the house. It was on a dingy street where stale bedding hung from windows and frowzy women gossiped on the steps. He had a three-room apartment, he had said. She guessed from the look of the street that his rent was small. She walked into the gaping blackness that was the hallway and began to look at the names above the bells.

Alien names: Barshefsky, Mallio, Giotinno, McGarnagle, Nicpopulos. Names scrawled in pencil and crayon. Names peering out from beneath great black blots fallen from pens held by inexpert hands. Above the top-floor bell she saw his name—an engraved name on a white card: Mr. Anthony Morrison Pierce. A brave cry in the wilderness.

She knocked on the door. There was no answer, but she could hear some one moving inside the

apartment. She knocked again, harder this time. Anthony's voice, angry and singularly nerve-racked, replied: "For the love of Mary, quit that damn' knocking!"

"It's—"

"Oh, you may as well come in. You've done it now!"

The door swung open, and in the half light Prudy saw Anthony standing before her with a wailing baby in his arms.

He looked tired, sheepish, and defiant all at once. He found words first.

"She's getting over the measles," he said.

She followed him into a small, light room where a Teddy bear sat on a typewriter, where a pair of booties bubbled out of a derby hat. A bowl of cereal nudged a glass of whisky, and a high chair was draped with a pair of pajamas.

Prudy took the baby from his arms. He did not seem surprised. An expression of relief crossed his face. Prudy looked at the baby. It was a frail, white wisp of life.

"Did you have a doctor?" Prudy asked.

"Two of them," Anthony answered. He gulped the whisky down. "She's all right now, only she's weak."

"Oughtn't she to get out in the sunlight?"

"I was going to take her out," he said, "but

I wanted her to have her nap first, and I wanted to clean—" His voice dwindled off into nothing and one thin hand made a weary gesture toward the dishes from which he had breakfasted and the floor over which he had scattered toys in a vain effort to interest the convalescent.

Downstairs Mrs. Malshowsky's phonograph played "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life," and Prudy King looked through the seductive little half veil on her hat at Anthony Pierce, then back at the miserable little wet creature she held in her arms.

"Oh, Anthony, why didn't you tell me? I could have helped."

"It's so stinkingly sentimental," he said. "Fancy drifting down Broadway and telling people that my wife was blonde and beautiful and that she died because she had heart trouble and a daughter at the same time. No, Prudy; somehow, I can tell filthy stories without feeling cheap, but I can't tell about the baby."

"You put her in clean clothes, Anthony, and I'll fix the house," Prudy said.

When he took the baby from her he looked at her strangely, but what he said was, "You're not a half-bad sort, Prudence."

"Anthony, I'm fresh, I guess, but listen: If we pooled our money we could all three live in a decent apartment somewhere. In a clean neighborhood—for

the baby, you know—and I could do so much for both of you."

"Prudy, I'm not a very good fellow."

"No, but your baby's wonderful and I love her. Besides, you're not a very bad fellow, and I can cook and clean, and you could sort of see that I kept out of bad company, and it would be an economical help, too."

"Prudy, you're an ace, but are you sure you—Just think. After all—"

"Don't rush me, Anthony. So far, I'm only anxious to put five pounds on your kid, twenty pounds on you, and save a little money for us all while I'm doing it. I'm not even trying to marry you. Don't be frightened."

Even two years in New York didn't make her forget that, melodramatic or no, John Shores had taken from her her chance at happiness. Never did the vision or a reminder of Garlock Greer fail to produce a sick longing for something that would not be strangled within her.

Young love. People laughed about it, but Prudy could never do more than smile crookedly at the memory of a boy who in another life had kissed her and had called her sweetheart. She had lost him and she dreamed of a moment when she could do something to John Shores that would make him realize

remotely how much she had ached for Wickesville and her dead little romance.

Somehow money and Shores seemed coupled in her mind. She must have money. If applied correctly it could inflict pain upon some one who had said, "Don't let Garlock Greer know you are easy." Oh, she had to fling a taunt as acrid as that at John Shores some day.

She worked at her dancing with the untiring zeal of a fiend. She knew now that she had something. She recognized her talent, not as an incidental help on a dark day, but a consuming, pressing force that had seized her and would carry her out of the scrap heap of oblivion. She was still in cafés, but she was making progress. It was a second-rate café. Not bad at all.

At three o'clock in the morning she would reach home flushed and exultant. Applause, even the applause of second-rate people, thrilled her. She would find the baby sleeping peacefully in the crib. Anthony would be reading. It was a pleasant life, the life this strangely assorted couple lived in a tiny apartment in Harlem.

The way Prudy King loved that baby was enough to make angels weep at the thought that Prudy hadn't one of her own. She bathed the child, she washed the clothes, she took her for walks, and played with her every afternoon.

When Anthony tried to do things for the child, Prudy cried. She took it as a reflection on her mothering.

Anthony was getting jobs for other girls now. He had desk room in a theatrical office. He entertained no more at stag dinners. The firm of Pierce & King was doing nicely and the souls of Prudy and Anthony asked no more questions, but reconciled themselves to the way of all flesh in a three-room apartment.

"Prudy, we could be married."

"No, we couldn't, darling."

She was in correspondence with Mrs. Mortimer now. She had not written the first year and had expected a blistering letter from her foster mother. Mrs. Mortimer was far too unemotional and much too garrulous to hold a year's silence against Prudy. She wrote an eight-page letter full of Wickesville gossip, none of which was of interest.

In her next letter Prudy asked for news of Garlock Greer and the Kind Thought Shop. Mrs. Mortimer replied that Garlock Greer had married Elsie May Hamilton and that the Kind Thought Shop was still functioning.

"Mr. Shores is still here," Mrs. Mortimer wrote. "I see him once in a while. Everybody who can afford it is moving up to the new buildings on North Van Dine Street. Mr. Shores will probably be moving up there next."

Prudy looked up from her letter. "John Shores' business is still going and Garlock Greer is married."

"And whom did he marry?"

"Elsie May Hamilton, a pale blonde with faded eyes."

"Quite so, and I'm sure she has a perfectly disgusting nose."

"You'll judge that for yourself, Anthony. In another year or so we're going to Wickesville, you and I."

"But I'm sure I shouldn't like the place," he said. But that wasn't what he was thinking. He watched her as she stood with a sunbeam falling aslant her russet hair. She was incredibly lovely with her lithe young form and her misty eyes. Her lips were full and eager.

She did not love him. She loved that dream which she had left back in a Mid-Western town. And some day, he thought, she will have that man. I have her now, for she is generous and kind, but this is just an interlude.

Prudy spoke: "Yes, we're going to Wickesville and make John Shores sorry."

Anthony faced her, leaning thoughtfully against the wall with his hands in his pockets. "Prudy," he asked, "just what are you going to do to John Shores?"

"I'm going to have an affair with him," she said calmly.

"An affair!"

"Yes. I'm going back to Wickesville with beauty and clothes and money. I'm going to make him love me so much that he'll forget caution and secrecy. I'm going to break up his home, and then I'm going to open the finest sweet shop that Wickesville ever saw, and I'll sell things at cost, and when he hasn't anything left I'm coming back to New York and dance."

"Yes," said Anthony; "I dare say."

"You see how much I wanted to marry Garlock Greer?" Prudy asked.

"And where does that gentleman fit into your picture?"

"He doesn't. He's married and he's forgotten me. But I never forget. I'm funny like that."

"And may I make so bold as to inquire my rôle in your delightful little play?"

"You're the comic relief, Anthony."

"Oh, I say, thanks."

It was the press agent of the Caprices who saw Prudy dance at the Midnight Club. He didn't believe it. He waited till it was time for her to dance again. By then he had sobered some.

In the morning the owner of the Caprices heard about her, and that night a slim, red-haired girl of

the Midnight Club danced her way on to the Caprices pay roll.

Anthony and Prudy went wild with excitement.

"I've landed!" she cried. "I'm going to do specialty dances in the Caprices. Imagine it, Anthony!"

They hugged each other and Prudy wept. They hugged the baby and plied her with ice-cream cones. Prudy in the Caprices. Fame and fortune. A two-year contract at five hundred a week.

"Who could want more out of any business than five hundred a week?" Prudy demanded.

But she had forgotten that speech when two years later she said to the owner of the Caprices, "Don't be silly, Francis. George Black will give me a thousand without an argument. I am the Caprices, you know. Let's say fifteen hundred or I'll go to Black just for spite."

Anthony, sitting on Francis' desk, idly smoking, had not forgotten. He laughed. This was still Prudy King, he was thinking, and nobody could take away the years they had been together.

In the month of June a strange sight burst upon the Wickesville landscape. All Wickesville had known that Prudy King, the star of the Caprices, was coming home to see her foster mother, but nobody expected anything like this.

Wickesville saw Prudy, a glittering redhead with a diamond anklet. They saw her manager, Mr.

Pierce, with his good-natured boredom, his impressive worldliness, and an unexplained child of radiant beauty who wore adorable frocks and pure silk hose.

Wickesville stared at an ugly French maid, who stared back at them and chattered volubly though unintelligibly about "Mees Prudy." Wickesville cringed beneath the cold and haughty scrutiny of an English governess. They wondered who the obliging gentleman was who carried hand bags, ran errands, and did favors for Mr. Pierce.

Wickesville thought it all over and decided that perhaps they ought to know Prudy. After all, she was a local girl who had made good. Everybody remembered what a cute baby she had been.

Alleged friends of her mother called on Prudy the second day. They promised to come again. Mrs. Mortimer sneered amiably.

A letter came:

"Dear Miss King:

"Forgive me for imposing upon the acquaintance my husband had with you so long ago. I am so anxious to meet you that I believe I should send this note even if he had never known you. Won't you and Mr. Pierce have dinner with us? I hear that you are leaving soon, so may I hope that tomorrow night at seven will be convenient?

"Sincerely,

"Elsie May Greer."

"And what," asked Anthony, "do we do about that?"

"We get into dinner clothes at six o'clock tomorrow evening," said Prudy. "It's too much to expect if you're hoping that I'll not go take a look at him."

"When does the affair with Shores begin?"

"Possibly the day after the Greers' dinner."

"Very well, m'lady. Eat, drink, and be merry, for all too soon the sword falleth."

Prudy gave Anthony a scared glance. There had been something in his voice which had frightened her. A new note.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Now, what would you imagine if you were forced to guess?"

"You're furious, I suppose."

"You have not overstated the case."

But, furious or no, Anthony Pierce was a cool and cheerful guest. Prudy swept into the Greer mansion hanging on his arm.

In the awe-inspiring drawing room their hostess awaited them. Prudy and she eyed each other with expressions that were too honestly critical for polite usage. Elsie May Greer saw a small, lovely figure in a pale green sheath, tiny slippers with jeweled heels, a pale and beautiful face crowned with jagged russet hair.

"Miss King, thank you so for coming!"

Prudy smiled. Her smile was not for her hostess; it was for her reception to the Greer mansion. She saw Elsie May Greer and pitied her. Heavens, what a sight! More faded than one can excuse in a woman just past thirty. Nervous, excitable, pale blue eyes. A dowdy gown. How could Garlock bear her?

"My husband will be here shortly," she said. "He's one of the bank directors now, you know, and since Daddy Greer died Garlock has the worry of the canning factory, too. He's anxious to see you, Miss King, and you, Mr. Pierce. He's always later for dinner nowadays. Sometimes I wish he hadn't any responsibilities. There's so much—"

"Yes, I'm sure there is," said Prudy. How the woman babbled!

Garlock Greer appeared in time for dinner. He strode across the room and seized Prudy's hand. She did not look at him until she had to. It was going to be a glad pain to see his face.

She looked. He had grown stouter, a bit coarser. Well, time passed. One could not expect him to remain a slim boy forever.

He took her in to dinner. It was a heavy, stupefying meal. Mrs. Greer tried to keep conversation alive. Anthony helped her. He hated himself for making her babble inanely, pointlessly on, but he could not leave her stranded. She, too, loved that hulking big Nordic blond.

Suddenly Prudy spoke. "How is the Kind Thought Shop?" she asked.

"Lonesome," Garlock replied.

"What do you mean?"

Garlock Greer coughed embarrassedly. He had certainly not meant that the way it sounded. "I mean," he explained, "that all the good stores are now up on North Van Dine Street. Shores hasn't the money to move up into the high-rent district, and nobody dreams of shopping in the old section."

"And what will he do?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Garlock carelessly. "The bank can't loan him any more money. I suppose he'll go to work for somebody."

Mrs. Greer arose from the table. "I dare say they'll talk Wickesville for an hour, Mr. Pierce. Let me show you the conservatory."

Anthony obeyed meekly. He had a curious feeling that Mrs. Greer was following a prearranged plan.

Garlock and Prudy withdrew to the music room. Garlock turned the radio set on and sat down on the sofa beside Prudy.

"God, you're a stunner!" he said.

His tone annoyed Prudy vaguely. It smacked of a traveling salesman's approach.

"Do you think so?" she asked.

"I always did. Say, what did you beat it out of Wickesville for?"

"That's a secret."

"Well, now that you're back, I don't care," said Garlock, and he kissed her.

Prudy drew away from him. Something was wrong. This wasn't the Garlock she remembered. This man was cheap, vulgar.

"I think I'd like to see the conservatory," she said.

A nasty expression crossed Garlock's face. "You're not high-hatting me, are you?"

Prudy's eyes regarded him calmly.

"Suppose I am?"

"Say, you're not in New York now. I *know* you."

"Interesting, if true."

"Didn't we chase around together all one summer and fall? You were a wise baby even then, and I was a dumbbell. I saw you the other day and cursed myself for not having kept you in Wickesville. I got Elsie to write you that letter."

"Oh, you did?"

"Sure. You know I might have married you if you hadn't beat it."

"Yes, and now *I'd* have crow's-feet from worrying over you."

"Pretty fresh, aren't you? Listen—isn't this Pierce the kid's father?"

"He is."

"Gee, you're a great one. I expected you to deny it."

"Why should I deny it?"

"Some women would claim to have been married."

Garlock's arm went around Prudy's waist. His mouth drew close to hers. "Can't we get to know each other better?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Why not?"

"Because I know you better now than I ever knew you before, and I'm not pleased even at this stage."

"Hey, hold on with the insults. Remember this is Wickesville."

"I find it hard to remember. I thought in Wickesville there was something I'd been cheated out of, but now I find it's the place where I was saved from something. Don't gape at me, Garlock. I'm on my vacation. During the season there are many Mid-Westerners who sit down front and gape at my seminudity.

"Now, let's talk business. I wish to put ten thousand dollars to the credit of John Shores, and he must never know where it came from."

"Why—what the hell—"

"It isn't your affair why I'm doing it. I'm just doing it. Let me have a blank check. I'm good for it, you know. John is the man I owe my success to. Figure it out!"

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